

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, January 12, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 12.

NEW YORK, June 13, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

ENGINEER STEVE, THE PRINCE OF THE RAIL. BY JAS. C. MERRITT.



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BY JAS. C. MERRITT.

CHAPTER I.

AN EXCITING CHASE—THE COAL GIVES OUT—THE CAR DEMOLISHED—A
FRIGHTFUL DISCOVERY.

"STEVE! Oh, Steve!"

"What is it, Leonard?"

"Mr. Franklyn wants to know how fast you are running?"

"Seventy miles an hour!"

"Whew! I knew she was a clippin', but I didn't suppose she was makin' as much as that."

"Every inch of it. Who brought Mr. Franklyn's message?"

"Frank Haydon, the water-boy."

"Has he gone back again?"

"Yes."

"All right."

Puff—puff, went the dense clouds of smoke.

Rattle—rattle—rattle, and the iron horse bounded over the steel rails with the literal speed of the wind.

"Hey, Leonard?"

"Well, what is it?" was the answer to a hail that came to the fireman about five minutes after the above brief conversation.

"Tell Steve Mr. Franklyn says he must make seventy-five miles."

"Steve!"

"Yes!"

"Make seventy-five?"

"Who says so?"

"Mr. Franklyn."

"Tell him I'll make eighty if he likes; the new drive-wheels will stand it, the road is so straight."

"Can you?"

"Yes; chuck in more coal."

"You're usin' it up mighty fast."

"Chuck it in as long as she lasts."

"All right, Steve; you're the engineer."

There is silence for a few minutes.

"Steve! Hey, Steve!"

"Who's that, Leonard?"

"It's Frank. He comes along every five minutes."

"It's ten since he came."

"So it is."

"What does he want now?"

"Another message from Mr. Franklyn."

"Chuck in more coal. What does he say?"

"What are you making?"

"Seventy-five."

"Gosh!"

"Another shovelful, Leonard! Ha! that starts her up! Has Frank gone back!"

"Yes."

"I was going to tell him I thought I could soon rush her up to eighty."

"Sho!"

"Certainly; that new patent arrangement of friction drive-wheels is immense."

"So I should think. I never saw such speed."

"And she runs smoothly, too."

"As if she was greased all over."

Away and away, past fields, where the astonished laborers stopped in their work to gaze upon the strange sight, over bridges, through gullies, forests and villages, sped the lightning express, never stopping once, and bowling along at the rate of more than seventy-five miles an hour.

The shriek of the powerful engine would be heard miles away from a busy town, and then, ere the echoes of the sound had died away, she would come tearing along with another shriek, and was gone almost as soon as she was seen.

Stephen Price, the young engineer, stood at his post, watched his indicators, handled his brakes with the utmost dexterity, looking ahead for obstacles. Occasionally sounding a warning to some slow-going farmer crossing the track, and now and then giving orders to Tim Leonard, his fireman.

The train was a short one, consisting of engine, tender, and one passenger car, generally used by the president of the road.

The great Northwestern Railway was a wealthy corporation, and could afford the latest and best improvements in rails, engines, rolling stock, and, in short, everything necessary to make the road what it was—the best in that part of the country.

Steve Price, although young, was the very best engineer on the road, and when any fast time was to be made, he was always called upon to run the engine.

He was a born engineer, and had been brought up to know everything about a locomotive from the time that he was scarcely strong enough to press down a brake or open a throttle.

His foster-father, now long since retired on account of ill-health, had taken the utmost pains with him, and made him a pride both to himself and his employers.

In fact, he had long ago earned and retained the honorable title of "Prince of the Rail," and was known by it from one end of the country to the other.

His natural tastes and abilities had been cultivated to the highest

degree, and many an old engineer, grown gray in the service, was proud to acknowledge Steve as his superior.

Handsome, graceful, straight as an arrow, genial and merry as a sunbeam, it was no wonder that he was a universal favorite, beloved alike by high and low, confided in by the president of the road, trusted by the traveling public, esteemed by all, and honored with the love of Miss Ida Franklyn, the daughter of the millionaire president, herself.

He was indeed the Prince of the Rail, but he bore himself so modestly withal, carrying off his honors without the slightest show of disdain or foolish pride, that his popularity was increased ten-fold.

"Stephen!"

The young engineer turned around quickly.

Mr. Franklyn himself was standing on the front platform of the one car, and had spoken to him.

The president of the road had taken the trouble to deliver his own message.

This was a compliment indeed.

"Yes, sir!"

"How are you running now?"

"Seventy-eight miles an hour, sir!"

"Good! Can you run it up to eighty?"

"I think so, sir! Pile her in, Leonard; give her another dose."

"We must overtake the scoundrel before he can get to the coast!"

"It was too bad the telegraph wires beyond Hayfield were broken."

"Yes, that caused us a bad delay."

"It may prove all right, sir."

"How so?"

"The villain will not know we are chasing him, and branch off on some other road."

"True; he will probably keep on this. He must not escape, Steve."

"Trust me for that, sir."

"How is it now?"

"Eighty, sir."

"Bravo, my lad! The directors shall hear of this when we get back. Such zeal shall not go unrewarded."

"I do only my duty, sir."

"Yes, and more. My own son would do less."

"He does not love as I do," was Steve's muttered answer.

"Keep her so, Steve, and we'll be sure to overcome the lead the wretch had upon us."

"It was curious, was it not?"

"What?"

"The strange warning we, that is, you had."

"The letter from that lunatic? Yes, it was passing strange."

"Hustle the coal, Leonard. We mustn't lose a minute, and once around this curve ahead of us, you'll see us go spinning."

"There's a hundred miles stretch of straight road beyond?"

"Yes, as straight as a string. You shall see how we'll hum along it."

"By the Lord!"

"What's the matter?"

"There isn't but half a ton of coal left."

"The mischief!"

"True as I live."

"Where's Mr. Franklyn?"

"Gone back."

"Holler to Frank?"

"Hi, there, you, Frank! Frank—oh, Frank!"

"What's the matter?" asked the water boy, coming out of the car.

"Tell Mr. Franklyn to come here a moment."

"All hunky!"

"Tell him the coal is giving out," added Steve, looking ahead.

"You bet!"

In another moment, Mr. Franklyn appeared.

"What's wrong, Steve?"

"Coal giving out, sir."

"Can't help it, Steve, we must keep up the rate. Burn wood!"

"Where shall I get it?"

"From my special car. I'll tear it all to pieces before I lose a second of the gain we are making upon that heartless scoundrel. Ida is worth more to me than a hundred cars, cost what they may."

"And to me, more than life!" said Steve, to his heart alone.

"I'll give you all the wood you want, in a moment," added Mr. Franklyn. "Give me your ax. Leonard, there's another one inside."

"Pile in your coal, Leonard," said Steve, when Mr. Franklyn had gone. "Snake in all you've got, dust and everything."

"The fire draws like the old boy, Steve; wonder it don't haul us in with it."

"I'd tie down the safety-valve, if I dared."

"We don't lose much, anyhow."

"No; you're right."

"There's all the coal you'll get this trip, unless you stop for some at Yankee Switch. Halloo, here comes the wood."

"Pile her up, Leonard, I don't want any just yet."

"That's the talk, Frank. Shove her over here. This stuff will burn like tinder."

Car seats, ornamental panels, window and door frames, blinds, baggage-racks and sills, were thrown into the tender, and piled up by the busy fireman, while Steve stood watching his engine, and looking out of the little window down the long, level line of track.

Suddenly a startled cry broke from his lips.

"The Lord help us!"

"What's the matter, Steve?"

"The bridge over Pine Tree Run is broken down; clean gone!"

"Gosh!"

"The jig's up, sure as fate."

"Shall I call Mr. Franklyn?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"I do not need him!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Jump the gap, and trust to luck to make the connection on the other side!"

CHAPTER II.

A WONDERFUL FEAT—A STRANGE MESSAGE.

"JUMP the gap?" gasped Leonard, scarcely crediting his ears.

"Yes, to be sure. It's not more than half as wide again as the length of the engine."

"You must be mad!"

"Chuck in your wood. Lively with you, there's not a second to lose."

"You'll kill us all."

"No, I won't. I know what I'm about. If you don't do as I tell you, I'll call Mr. Franklyn."

"Call and be blowed; I ain't going to get killed!"

"Look here, Tim Leonard," said Steve, sternly, grabbing up an armful of wood and throwing it into the fire, "I am running this engine. We can't stop now, to save our necks, before we get to that run, and the faster we go the safer we will be."

"All right, Steve, you're the boss."

"I intend to leap right over that chasm, and I'll do it if she makes that last mile in half a minute."

"All right."

"Now, then, shove her in quick, we're almost there! By Jove! it's hit or miss, get across or burst the boiler! I am going across!"

From this elevated position, and owing to a slight curve, Steve had seen that the track over a deep but narrow run, about two miles ahead, was broken down.

He at once made up his mind that he must leap the chasm or give up the chase.

He did not know if he could do so or not, but meant to lose no time in making his preparations.

As he approached the place, he could see that the break was a clean one, and he resolved to risk the leap.

Leonard had obeyed his orders, and the engine was now flying over the track at the highest rate of speed it had ever attained, even during the last hour.

The gap was not a quarter of a mile ahead.

Beneath, roared and surged the boiling waters, sixty feet below, a natural gorge affording them a passage.

To go down would be certain destruction.

The risk was a terrible one!

But then, the end to be accomplished!

The safety of the beloved child of the rich railway king depended upon Steve's getting over and continuing his journey.

An hour's delay would ruin all his plans, and the scoundrel he was pursuing would have reached the coast.

Once there he could take an outgoing ship and leave the country.

Once allowed to escape, there was but small chance of his being taken.

Everything was at stake, and compared to this the risk was but trifling.

Steve had long loved Ida Franklyn in secret, and would have risked ten times as much to rescue her from danger, save her good name, and punish the presumptuous wretch who had dared to steal her, perforce, from her father's roof.

Loving her with his whole heart, what would he not risk to save her?

Though he knew it not, she loved him as deeply as he loved her, but even with this knowledge he could not have done more than he was now doing.

Once he made a resolve, he was certain to carry it out, if it were possible.

He had vowed to rescue the young lady, and no open bridge was going to stand in his way!

Such things as leaping an opening had been done before, and could be done again.

The rate of speed was higher than anything yet accomplished, and on a straight road, the faster he went the more chance he had of doing what he intended.

Only ten feet away now, and Steve, setting his lips firmly, stands rooted to his post ready to take the risk.

There is no stopping now, no turning back!

It is all or nothing!

Like a flash the engine clears the intervening space, and with an increased impetus leaps the gap!

Not the tenth part of a second is occupied in making the awful jump.

Not the slightest amount does she fall, not the minutest part of an inch; but striking the rails at exactly the same level as those on the other side of the gap, she rushes ahead down the gleaming track.

The danger is passed on the very instant it presents itself.

The gap is cleared, and no one but the brave engineer and his fireman know the terrible peril they have escaped.

Engine, tender and passenger car have all passed safely, and not even the slightest jar intimates to the passengers that anything has been wrong.

Not until the danger is over, does Mr. Franklyn know what has happened.

Then, pausing for a while in the work of demolition, the tender being full of fuel, he chances to look out the rear door of the car.

He sees the track missing over the chasm, beneath which he knows a torrent roars, black and tumultuous.

The train has passed over it without disturbing a hair upon his head.

It is marvelous!

He will not believe his eyes, but hurrying forward, shouts to Steve:

"Did you know that the bridge over Pine Tree Run had fallen down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you feel it fall when you went over?"

"No, sir!"

"You didn't?"

"No; for it did not fall when I passed over."

"But it is down now!"

"I know it."

"How do you know if you did not feel it fall?"

"I saw that it was gone before I came to the Run. I knew the gap was there, but was bound to clear it."

"Without saying anything to me about it?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you had failed?"

"That did not enter into my calculations. I meant to succeed!"

"And so you have!"

"You don't mind my not saying anything to you about it now, do you, sir?"

"No! You could not have done it better, and if I had known the danger I might have frightened you so that you would not do so well."

"That would have done me no good. Perfection was the only thing that would answer in a job like that."

"You have reached it in everything you have undertaken, and they may well call you the Prince of the Rail."

"Excuse me, sir! Leonard, give me some more wood."

"You're a trump, Steve, and when we catch that villain and rescue my beloved Ida from his clutches, ask me anything you like; it shall be granted."

"Anything, sir?"

"Yes, anything!"

"But I may make an unreasonable demand?"

"I can trust you for that; I do not doubt that you will come far within the bounds of your deserts."

"I hope I shall, sir."

"You still go eighty, do you?"

"Yes, sir; we did more than that going over the gap, but that was an emergency, and I've slowed up since. Steel and iron couldn't stand such speed long."

"Can you reach Rockwell's Bluff by this evening?"

"I guess so, sir; but we must stop at Norman's Bend for coal."

"Can you spare the time?"

"Yes."

"Why not stop at Yankee Switch?"

"There's no necessity for it. No trains will be in the way, and they don't have the same facilities for loading up as quickly as they do at the other place."

"I suppose not."

"Norman's Bend is further on, and then, I should be afraid to run over the bridge and around that sharp curve as fast as we are going now; I couldn't do it."

"If you couldn't, then no one could; that's plain!"

"Thank you, sir. There's another reason besides."

"What is it?"

"Shove in your wood, Leonard, and tell Frank to bring more pretty soon. There's plenty more, is there not, Mr. Franklyn?"

"Yes; plenty."

"The other reason is, that when we get to Norman's, there is but a single track from there to Rockwell's Bluff, and we shall have to telegraph for the road to be kept clear."

"You can certainly reach there by night?"

"If I can get all the coal I want at Norman's."

"And wait long enough to get it in the tender?"

"Yes, and load a small car besides."

"What for?"

"To burn! You wouldn't mind riding on top of coal, would you?"

"Not a bit. The officers and myself are under your care; do just as you think best."

"I will! More wood, Leonard."

"Here she is. Halloo, there you, Frank, fetch me some more fuel. Set your woodchoppers to work there lively. There's no chance of getting anything to speak of along the road."

"No, a whole town between this and Yankee Switch wouldn't give us enough. It's a regular desert."

Yankee Switch was reached and passed, and the travelers in the train standing on the siding were surprised to see the wonderful speed with which Steve rushed past.

They could not imagine what was the matter, the accident to the wires having prevented them from getting the news.

Fortunately, the switch-tender saw Steve coming a long way ahead, and had sided the other train, which was bound east, until Steve should pass.

Norman's Bend was about forty miles beyond, and every available bit of wood had been crammed into the furnace and burned by the time it was reached.

Steve still had considerable steam up, though the coal came just in season.

Word was sent along the line to keep the road clear, the wires being all right at this place, and Mr. Franklyn sent a particular message for the authorities to arrest a light-complexioned man having a young lady with him.

Minute descriptions of both were sent, with full directions to de-

tain the man, and, at any rate, to prevent him from taking the lady any further with him.

A train was then made up, consisting of the engine, tender, and baggage car, the tender and half the car being loaded with coal.

In the other half of the car were Mr. Franklyn, Frank Haydon, three officers and the secretary of the railroad, who was Mr. Franklyn's most intimate friend.

Steve opened the throttle when all was ready, and the train sped on its way at a rate of forty-five miles an hour to begin with.

A mile out of the station there was a large stone building standing close to the track, at one end of which was a high wall made flush with the building, and extending forty feet beyond it.

While passing this wall a heavy billet of wood came crashing through the cab window, narrowly missing Steve's head.

The boy picked up the missile, and discovered a note fastened to it, written with blood.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLINES OF A FIENDISH PLOT.

HASTILY glancing over the note, Steve uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Go and tell Mr. Franklyn to come here at once," he said to Leonard.

In a few moments the president was in the cab with Steve.

"Here is another note from the same mysterious hand as that which warned you against the scoundrel who abducted your daughter," said Steve, excitedly.

"Read it, my lad; we may learn something new."

As reference has heretofore been made to this warning, and as there are things which need an explanation, in order that the reader may have a better understanding of what is to follow, we will now go back a little before continuing this narrative.

Upon the day previous to that on which this story begins, the president and secretary were sitting in the office of the southeastern terminus of the road when a messenger brought in a sealed letter, which read as follows:

"Beware of Mason. False as Satan. Cruel, grasping, scheming, devilish men are not to be trusted. Who is sane and who is not in these days? Trust no one. Beware of all. The fiends leap upon my back and beat me with iron rods. Look into everybody's accounts. Look to your homes, lest the dear ones be snatched away. Deep plots are sometimes overheard and exposed—thwarted—upset by a

"LUNATIC."

"This is a most extraordinary epistle, Mr. Locke. I do not know what to make out of it. Read it."

"It seems to be a warning against Mr. Mason, one of our oldest clerks. Do you suspect him?"

"No. However, this affair must be investigated."

There was no clew to the sender of the singular letter. It had come by mail, but had been posted on a train, though at what station the mail agent did not remember.

Mr. Franklyn called for Mason to be sent into the private office, but he was informed that the man had left town half an hour before, to go up the road a few miles to look into some accounts, and would be back by eleven o'clock.

Before that time a message came from Mr. Franklyn's residence, requesting that Miss Ida would return at once, as some particular friends wished to see her.

The young lady had not been to the office, and her father was surprised that she should be sent for.

Hurrying to the house, he learned, for the first time, that a gentleman from the office had called at the house with a message from him to his daughter, desiring to see her at once.

Remembering at once the warning, he asked if they knew the man. They said that they did, and that it was Mr. Mason.

Going to the station, a new surprise awaited him.

He found that he had been reported as lying in a critical condition, the result of an accident, and that Mason had been sent to break the news to Miss Ida, and accompany her to the scene of the disaster.

There had been an accident indeed, and the poles and wires at Hayfield were fallen down and broken, and as the place was but a small station, it would be some time before connection could be made.

Apprehending the worst, Mr. Franklyn telegraphed to Hayfield to know if Mason had been seen there.

The answer was that he had been on the train that passed through the town an hour before the receipt of the message, and in company with a young lady supposed to be Miss Franklyn.

The millionaire at once attempted to telegraph ahead to have Mason stopped, but reports came to him that the eastern-bound train—only just arrived at Hayfield—had passed many places where the high wind had thrown down the poles and broken the wires.

"Our only chance, then, is to chase the villain," said Mr. Franklyn, in great excitement. "Do you go to the yard, Mr. Locke, and have a train made up. Get Stephen Price, if you possibly can. If he is disengaged, tell him what I want him for, and he will go fast enough."

"And you——"

"Will run to the police station and get some good men, rejoin you by the time the train is ready, and then we will start after this villain Mason. I would never have suspected him of such rascality."

"I'll attend to the business at once."

"By the way, telegraph as far ahead as you can, and have the track kept clear. I intend to run just as fast as I can, and trains ahead of us had better go upon the sidings, and let us pass without stopping."

Fortunately for the scheme, Steve was found just entering the yard with a train when Mr. Locke arrived.

Though somewhat fatigued, the youth offered his services at once, and busied himself getting ready for the undertaking on hand.

There was in the yard a new engine of heavy caliber to which had been attached a new kind of friction drive wheels of extra strength, which it was calculated could run at a higher rate of speed than had yet been attained.

Steve at once ordered this new locomotive to be run out and fired up, and by the time Mr. Franklyn returned everything was in readiness.

Besides the engineer and his fireman, there were Frank Haydon, who was taken along in order to do odd jobs, deliver messages, and make himself generally useful. Being a bright lad, he was quite a favorite, and generally accompanied Mr. Franklyn upon his trips over the road in his special car.

The two gentlemen and three detectives made up the list, not forgetting to mention two brakemen, and with these and no more the train puffed away amid the cheers of the assembled workmen, railroad employees and citizens.

For the first half hour Steve ran at a good forty-mile gait, but seeing that his engine was capable of much more, he gradually increased his speed till at the end of an hour and a half he was making seventy.

The scoundrel had got a good three hours' start, and in order to catch him Mr. Franklyn had calculated that they would have to greatly increase their speed.

It was at this time that he sent word to Steve to try and make seventy-five miles, and when a few minutes later he felt the increase his spirits arose.

When he found some time afterwards that they were making eighty miles, he felt confident of catching Mason as soon as the latter arrived, being sure that if nothing happened to prevent that Steve would get in close behind the other train.

"This note is from the same mysterious hand as the other," he said, after hurriedly reading the letter thrown in at the train, "and I am surprised at it. How can the writer know so much?"

"What does it say, sir?"

"He says that blood will tell, evidently a grim joke upon the color of his ink. It looks like blood, but is not. He says that Mason passed here on a single locomotive, and not on a train."

"Is the letter addressed to you, sir?"

"Not particularly, but to 'whom it may concern.' He raves about one thing and another, as in the other letter, and closes with this extraordinary sentence. It is as follows:

"When sane men are made insane by their own children for mercenary reasons, let the heir be cautious if he still lives. A child of three years old, here something is either omitted or made so illegible that I cannot make it out, but will proceed: 'Now eighteen or nineteen, and can be identified by marks on his arms; the letters E. S., and a locomotive. Mason is a villain; I know him now; he is a would-be parricide, and I fear has killed my child—my boy, who bears those marks.'"

"Good Heaven! I bear marks on my arms identical with those!" said Steve, excitedly. "Can this unfortunate man be my father?"

"There is more," continued Mr. Franklyn. "He says he writes thus that someone may come and deliver him from the insane asylum where he has been kept for fifteen years by his own son. A friendly assistant has undertaken to deliver this letter, but dare do no more."

"It cannot be possible that two children could be marked exactly alike, could it?" said Steve. "Besides that, my father is not insane, and I have always lived with him."

"Mr. Price is not your father."

"Impossible!"

"By no means. It is not generally known, but you are only an adopted child. I recollect perfectly his taking you, a friendless waif, from the poor house, and taking you to his own home."

"The poor house!"

"Yes."

"Are my own parents then living?"

"No one knows. They may be, though I have never heard of them."

"We must try and fathom this mystery when we get back. If this poor creature in the asylum at home is indeed my father, we must rescue him."

"We must, indeed. Maybe Mason could tell us something."

"I will make him."

"How far are we from Rockwell's now, Steve?"

"A hundred miles."

"It is growing late."

"Yes."

"Can you get there on time?"

"I will endeavor to."

"When should his train be due?"

"It waited for us to go by."

"Suppose the single engine passed the asylum an hour ahead of us."

"We ought to catch it this side of Rockwell's."

Ten minutes pass away in silence.

Then suddenly Steve utters a cry:

"Do you see that light?"

"Yes; what is it?"

"A single engine running wild."

CHAPTER IV.

A CLEVER RUSE, AND HOW IT WAS THWARTED.

"Is she going fast, Steve?" asked Mr. Franklyn.

"Yes, at the top of her speed."

"You can catch up?"

"After a while."

"Do it."

"Shall I hit him?"

"Yes; but don't injure my beloved child."

"Trust me for that, sir."

The engine ahead was running away from Steve, or, more properly speaking, was not coming toward him, and was making good time.

Darkness had just settled down, and though the moon was not out, the stars were shining in myriads, and gave considerable light.

The air was cold and bracing, not uncomfortably so, and Steve felt a glow all through his system as he breathed in the invigorating air.

Mr. Franklyn remained in the cab, occupying Leonard's seat, and watching the track ahead of him.

The single locomotive was making all the speed it was capable of, the smoke coming out in thick puffs in which the red sparks glowed like flaming stars.

The headlight of Steve's engine illuminated the other strongly, and the boy could see the outlines of the men upon it, but could not distinguish their faces.

There seemed to be two persons, and as they flitted to and fro in the strong light the sharp lines of their figures stood out, making the forms very plain and distinct.

They were both men, but Mr. Franklyn reasoned that his daughter was concealed somewhere, probably strapped to the engineer's seat, and was thus out of sight.

Clatter—clatter—clatter!

Rattle—rattle!

Puff—puff!

Toot—toot!

Ding—dong—ding!

Way-stations, crossings, bridges, side tracks, and flagmen's boxes were rapidly passed, both engines signaling regular as if nothing was the matter and they were running on their usual trips.

Such travelers as chanced to be out wondered at seeing two engines bowling along the track, but none of them supposed that they were witnessing a most exciting chase.

Faster, still faster went the pursued, the pursuer being still the same distance behind.

Steve did not want to run into the other locomotive if he could help it, but meant to get near enough so that Mr. Franklyn could hail the villain who was carrying off his daughter, and let him know that he was on the track.

The distracted president had resolved to let Mason go scott free provided Ida was given up; for he would rather compromise in such a matter than lose his child.

At last Steve began to gain rapidly upon the lone engine, and the forms of the two men who were running it showed up more plainly than ever.

Suddenly Steve began to shut off steam.

"What's the matter, Steve?"

"I've got to stop."

"What for? Coal giving out?"

"No."

"Got more steam than you can safely carry?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Look ahead!"

Mr. Franklyn did so, and started violently.

"What do you see?"

"A cloud of white smoke or steam, which nearly conceals the locomotive."

"Exactly! Do you know what that means?"

"No. What?"

"They have stopped."

"Stopped?"

"Yes," replied the boy, diminishing his speed greatly.

"Hark!"

The cry came from Steve.

"What is it?"

His only answer was to put his brake hard down, and reverse the motion.

"What are you doing?"

"Going to run backwards."

"Backwards! What for, in the name of chain lightning?"

"Because that other engine is coming this way."

"Coming this way?"

"Yes; and at full tilt."

"You don't mean to run away?"

"You can't afford to have the train wrecked?"

"No, indeed."

The single engine had reversed, and was coming directly toward them.

She was running at the highest rate of speed she had ever attained, even during this wild chase.

She throbbed like the heart of some great monster, and the black smoke rushed out in volumes, the steam hissing and snapping tremendously.

Steve had not reversed any too soon, for by the time he had discovered the approach of the engine, and had begun to retreat, finding himself the pursued instead of the pursuer, the latter was not two hundred feet away.

The enemy had adopted a very clever ruse.

"Hold on, there, Mason!" shouted Mr. Franklyn. "I want to talk to you."

There was no response.

"I'll give you better terms than you deserve."

Still there was no answer!

What could it mean?

Did Mason intend to destroy his late employer, if possible, and so prevent any further interference in his nefarious schemes?

"By Jove! I understand his dodge now. I didn't suppose he was smart enough for that."

It was Steve who had spoken.

"What do you mean, Steve?"

"We must go faster."

Leonard threw in coal as fast as he could handle it, and the furnace glowed like a volcano.

Smoke and flame both came from the stack, and the indicator showed that a tremendous amount of steam was being used.

Faster and faster they went, gaining perceptibly upon the lone engine.

"What's the matter, Steve?"

"Will you let me carry out a plan I have in my head?"

"Yes."

"Do just as I please?"

"Go ahead; I will rely upon you implicitly, as I always have."

"You have full confidence in me?"

"I have."

"That engine has nobody on board!"

"What?"

"They have abandoned her and have set her loose upon us in order to throw us from the track!"

"You are sure?"

"Positive; I can tell by the way she is going, and then I have been watching her closely."

"'Tis a fiendish plot!"

"It is, indeed, but I will outwit them."

"How?"

"Heap on more coal, Leonard!"

"All right! in she goes."

"I shall throw that engine from the track; tumble her straight over into the ditch."

"How are you going to do it?"

"You know the high embankment a mile or so below Redmond's?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice the pile of ties that are to be used in building a siding there?"

"No."

"They have been there for several days."

"I have not noticed them."

"You do not go over the road as much as I do."

"No, that's so."

"I have a plan which I'll tell you about when we get there."

"It is ten miles back, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Very well; I can wait."

Steve put on all the steam he could carry, and his engine fairly flew over the rails.

The ten miles were covered in about seven minutes.

Then Steve came to a stop as soon as he could and running ahead slowly, stood on the track just beside the pile of ties.

On one side of the track the bank was very steep, and there was no space to walk upon, the ends of the ties themselves hanging over the edge.

On the other side there was a width of about ten feet, and here a number of heavy ties had been placed.

"Scramble out, all of you!" shouted Steve, jumping to the ground.

"What's up?" asked the detectives.

"I've got some work for you to do. Come along, Frank, Leonard, and all hands."

Everybody left the car and stood by his side.

"Pile up some of these ties on the track," he said.

The men seized the heavy timbers and began carrying them along the track for a few feet.

"That's it. Aha, Mr. Franklyn, I did not expect that you were going to work with the rest."

"I ought to take my share with the others, because I have more interest in the success of the plan than they have."

"True! Hold up, that's far enough!" called out Steve to Frank and Leonard. "No—no, don't put it down that way, we want to throw the engine down the embankment, so you want most of your stuff on the other side."

Under his guidance a hastily-constructed but very solid barrier was

built upon the track for the purpose of derailing the approaching engine.

The work had to be done rapidly, for the sound of the engine's coming could be heard distinctly, and before the work was completed the rails began to rattle.

"Hurry up, boys; lively, now—lively, or the thing won't work."

Every single one of them worked with a will, and as Steve directed everything, there was no confusion, no mistakes, and just as the engine came rumbling down the track at a pretty good rate of speed, although not as fast as it had been going, the work was hurried up, and completed when it was about thirty yards off.

Steve himself threw on the last stick, and then, running back to his engine, jumped in.

The others had got aboard, so, starting up slowly, he backed down the track, his head-light showing up well the doomed engine.

There had been no time to spare, for just then the solitary locomotive dashed against the obstruction.

It had been well built, and withstood the shock.

The engine trembled, tottered to one side, and hung for a second over the edge of the track.

Then it toppled more and more, and losing its balance, fell clear of the track, and rolled over and over down the bank.

The experiment had been successful.

CHAPTER V.

THE WRITER OF THE WARNING LETTERS.

STEVE had again proved his value as an engineer, and shown another side of his inventive genius.

Over and over rolled the engine, dashing against rocks and trees, tearing huge gullies in the earth, and carrying destruction in its path.

It never stopped until it reached bottom, three hundred feet below, and then what was left was not worth crying about.

The smoke-stack had been demolished at the second revolution, and broken off at the next; the cab was in ruins after the first, and the boiler burst when the journey was about half finished, the report being heard for miles.

A blazing wake was left behind, the gleaming coals from the furnace being scattered out along the way, and setting fire to such small shrubs and dry sticks as they happened to alight among.

The track, very fortunately, had not been injured materially, the rails being good ones, and firmly put down.

One or two had been broken, but the damage was not bad enough to prevent Steve from passing over the track, and he sprang down from the engine as soon as he saw the final destruction of the unfortunate locomotive accomplished, and called for his passengers to help him remove the obstructions.

All hands worked rapidly, and pretty soon the track was once more clear, and the journey was resumed.

"What had we better do now?" asked Mr. Franklyn, sitting by the young engineer's side as the train rolled along.

"About catching this scoundrel, you mean?"

"Yes."

"We might as well go on to where we turned back, at all events, sir," replied Steve; "we may hear something of him there."

"Not a bad idea."

"Then we'd better go ahead to Rockwell's, if we don't catch him, so as to prevent his slipping away from us there."

"You think he was on that engine before they reversed?"

"I know he was. I recognized him just before they stopped."

"Then he must have jumped off and started the engine backwards?"

"Of course."

"If I discover who the engineer was I'll discharge him, and prevent his getting work on any other road in the West."

"Serve him right, too!"

Away they went at a high speed, and soon the place was reached where they had started back, but nothing was seen of Mason or the engineer, and no one was in sight who could tell anything about them.

Steve concluded to run ahead a little further in the hope of coming across the villains, who he presumed would be on the railroad track.

He thought that the man would imagine the train had been wrecked, and consequently not make any extra exertions to get away,

and it was with a good deal of confidence that he rattled on, not as fast as before, but at good speed.

Three or four miles beyond was a switch and an unfinished side track, which ended abruptly before a mass of rough boulders.

Steve discovered that this switch was turned so as to send him upon the rocks, and he stopped his train not more than a foot or two behind it.

"That's some of this villain's work, and he must still be ahead of us," said Steve. "I'll have to turn that switch and keep a good lookout in future."

He jumped down and found that the switch had been fastened, and the lock so battered with some iron instrument as to make it impossible to fit a key to it.

The switch was all right, however, and Steve being considerable of a machinist, always carrying a small kit of tools with him, soon cut the lock entirely away, and released the lever or bar that controlled the switch.

The latter was then put in its proper place, and the train started on again, Steve keeping a sharp lookout on both sides of the track, for he could not tell what mischief Mason might attempt.

At the end of another half mile they came to a draw-bridge, which was occasionally opened for freight vessels to go through, there being quite a little traffic of that kind.

It was open when they reached it, although no vessels were in sight.

The little house, where the keeper remained when off duty, stood at the side of the track not far off, and through the little window could be seen a light.

Steve had stopped his train on the very brink, and jumping from the engine, ran to the bridge-tender's house to see why he had not been attending to his business.

The door was closed and locked.

Steve ran to the window, but it was too high to allow him to look in, and he came back to the door.

Bracing himself for the effort, he put his shoulder against the door, which was but a slight affair, and burst it open.

It fell in with a crash, and as Steve stepped into the room a horrible sight met his gaze.

The bridge-tender lay upon the floor in a pool of blood, and by his side was a hammer, the head of which was wet with the same crimson fluid.

"The man has been murdered!" shouted Steve. "Come here, quick!"

Mr. Franklyn, Leonard and the detectives came running up as they heard his startling cry.

"This is some more of that wretch's work!" muttered Steve. "What a consummate villain he must be! He is determined as the very Old Boy himself."

"We must follow him up, Steve," said Mr. Franklyn, "for he is probably still ahead of us. Can you turn the bridge?"

"With the greatest ease. The scoundrels, for Mason probably has the false-hearted engineer still with him, probably tried to induce the keeper to turn the bridge, and as he would not, they set upon and killed him."

"That is undoubtedly the case."

Steve soon succeeded in turning the bridge back into its place, and was about to run his engine over it, when he heard a shout, and glancing back, saw a wild-looking man running towards him, pursued by a howling crowd.

"Stop him—stop him!" they cried.

The man was running along the track, and had reached the train when Steve first saw him.

He was only about half dressed, wore a long, tangled beard, and a mass of brown hair, matted and unkempt.

Behind him was a motley crew of police-officers, farmers, boys, tramps and rough women, all howling and yelling at the top of their voices.

They were armed with pistols, clubs, stones and other missiles, and by the blood on the unfortunate creature's head and arms, some of them had undoubtedly wounded him.

The train had started, but, with a despairing cry, he bounded to the engine, seized the iron handle at the side, jumped upon the iron step, and fell forward upon the floor of the cab as the train dashed e bridge, leaving the disappointed pursuers far behind.

Steve lifted the poor man tenderly from where he lay, and placed him upon the seat, stanching the blood upon his forehead with a dampened handkerchief, and binding up the wound in his arm.

The man looked wonderingly at his preserver, staring at him with his large expressionless eyes, and muttering softly to himself, never taking his gaze from Steve, but followed him with that strange glance wherever he moved.

"There, my man, you are better now, I fancy," said the lad. "How did it happen? Don't tell me if you are not strong enough."

"Do you believe me mad?" asked the man, looking earnestly at his companion, for Leonard was in the tender and Mr. Franklyn had gone back into the car.

"Certainly not, though I believe those brutes would have made you so."

"Ah, that is it. I was not mad, but they maltreated me, beat me, put me in a dark cell, starved me, worked me, tortured me. Oh, the agony of those years! God alone knows what I have suffered! Why does He permit such things, if He is so good and kind as the sleek chaplain says? He lies—he lies! There is no God, no Heaven! Nothing but hell, and I have lived in it, oh, so many years."

"There—there, be calm, poor man—be calm!" said Steve, soothingly. "They shall harm you no more. I will not let them."

"You do not know their power. I have escaped before, and it has always gone worse with me afterwards. They scourge me with hissing, biting serpents, and pour vinegar into my aching wounds. They lock me in a dark cell with jibbering ghosts and staring corpses! They look at me with their stony eyes, and point their grisly, ghastly fingers at me! Ha-ha! I see them now!" he shrieked, springing up. "Take them away—take them away!"

He would have leaped from the train, had not Steve restrained him.

"Sit down," said the boy, kindly. "They shall not harm you, I say. I am strong, and the engine is swift. They will not catch us, and I will never let them take you."

"I had a boy once, who should have been kind, but he was not. He tried to kill me to get my money. He said I was crazy, and put me into the asylum. And his little brother, my baby-child, whom I intended to be a brave, wise man—oh, my God!—he sought his life, too. I know he failed—I know it, for often, in my dreams, do I see him."

"What is he like?"

"He is tall, and strong, and handsome—so handsome! He is honored and confided in; he has followed in the path I meant he should. He is an engineer, and his train goes by my cell window; I see him often, but he does not know me."

"What is his name?"

"His name? I do not know, but he is brave and beautiful. He will hunt down the villain who has caused me such misery. My own son, my eldest, ha—ha! they call him Mason! Ashamed of his name? Yes—yes, he is, for he has disgraced it. But I warned the men—yes, I warned them, and they are on his track! To-night I broke away and wrote a letter. I saw him running away with a lovely lady. She hates him, for he is a villain!"

Steve had rolled up his shirt sleeves during this rambling speech, and the poor, half-crazed man caught sight of his bared arm.

Upon it, tattooed in India ink, were some letters, and the representation of a locomotive.

The man seized him by the shoulder, and gazed into his face, a look of intelligence appearing in those large eyes for the first time since he had jumped upon the engine.

"That mark!" he said. "Where did you get it?"

"I have borne it since childhood."

"My little boy had such a mark! Aha, it is not false, my dream! My boy does live! I have seen him! You are not deceiving me?"

"No."

"Kind Heaven has done this for me. You are my son, my own true son!"

"And the man, Mason —"

"Is your elder brother! I tell you, boy," he said, suddenly, speaking with great earnestness, and without the slightest incoherence, "God sometimes permits strange things to happen, in order to try our hearts. You are my son, whom a wicked man has tried to kill. Your brother to get away my property, which I determined he should

not have, has done many crimes. Together we will follow upon his track, and bring him to justice."

CHAPTER VI.

REMINISCENCES.

SOME fifteen years before the beginning of this story, the father of Stephen Price, as we shall call him, for the present, was a wealthy mechanical engineer living in Springdale, as we shall call the southern terminus of the railroad, it not being necessary to give the true name, and at the time the Great North Western Railway was but a year or so old.

He had made his money in railroads, and possessed several shares of the new one, although the stock at that time was worth very little. His property was quite large, however, and his dissolute son, Robert, aged about thirty was in hopes of soon coming into possession.

There was a boy of about three years old, and a bright, merry little fellow for his age when the events I am about to describe occurred.

Robert had grown to be so bad that his father had threatened to disinherit him, leaving all his property to his youngest brother, the intermediate ones having died, as well as their mother.

It was whispered that if Robert had been a more dutiful son his mother would have lived longer, but that sorrow for his prodigal conduct had driven her to an untimely grave.

No sooner had the indignant father announced his intentions, than rumors began to spread abroad that he was insane.

They became so widespread that people passing him in the street would hurry by or turn out as if he was some unclean thing.

Friends deserted him, and people pointed at him and made annoying remarks concerning him in his very presence. All this was very distressing, but matters soon became worse.

He was seized one night while asleep, bound and gagged, carried off in the middle of the night to a private insane asylum, where he was incarcerated and allowed to see no one.

A regularly signed certificate of insanity was shown by Robert to such as inquired concerning him, together with the information that his case was a hopeless one.

The asylum was at some distance and not very accessible, and when any of the unfortunate man's friends went there, they were told that it was not the day for visitors.

The day underwent many changes also, sometimes being Tuesday and sometimes Friday, and then again entirely abolished for a few weeks, on account of repairs to the asylum.

Then the patient would be too violent for any one to see him in safety, or he was asleep and could not be awakened, or was at his meals, or perhaps taking a walk in the garden.

Other pretexts were given to prevent his being seen, and at last it was announced that he was no longer in the place, having become too unmanageable.

For a time the poor man had been kept merely as a prisoner, and had not been maltreated or abused, but merely allowed no freedom.

He made several attempts to escape, but by the treachery of some of the servants, who had promised to aid him, he had been detected and was put in closer confinement.

This sort of thing lasted a year or so, during which time he saw nothing of his friends, was not permitted to go out, had nothing with which to employ himself, and saw no one but his jailers.

Then his frenzied efforts to escape from this living death caused his son to send certain orders to the asylum, which were carried out forthwith.

If the poor man had not been insane before, the treatment he received would have made him so, and his condition became pitiful in the extreme.

The most exquisite tortures, the very refinement of cruelty were practiced upon him without ceasing, and at the end of another year he became a raving maniac.

He was put in straight-jackets; confined in dark cells for hours; deprived of food; put under a water-spout, and the fluid allowed to fall drop by drop upon his head until he would be nearly frantic.

Sometimes the cruel keepers would stretch him, face down, upon a hard board, to which he was securely strapped, and then tickle the soles of his bare feet, his struggles to escape only causing him to bruise and lacerate himself.

Again they would whip him with thongs of thin steel wires, pouring vinegar and alcohol upon his wounds while they were still bleeding.

Once, with the strength that only a madman can possess, he broke away from his tormentors, and seizing one by the throat, dashed his brains out against the wall.

When told of this, Robert only laughed, and said that it was the man's own fault; he should have been more careful, and if he could not act with proper prudence, he ought to be killed.

The human fiend who kept the place was very angry, but a present of a hundred dollars calmed his ruffled feelings, and made him as pleasant and benevolent as a very Chadband.

Five years more passed away, during which a series of torturing was kept up whenever the patient showed signs of recovery, and continued until he became wild and unmanageable.

In seven years he killed ten men, and the suave keeper of the asylum remonstrated with Robert, suggesting that it was the easiest thing in the world to kill the patient, and so prevent any further annoyance.

To this Robert replied, that once his father was dead, the annual sum paid for his care would be discontinued.

The smooth-faced villain bowed and retired and soon announcement of the death of one of the incurable patients was made.

This was a sort of compromise, so that the public attention should not be called to the practices in vogue in the establishment, and yet enable the wolves in sheep's clothing to draw their handsome salary from Robert.

For his own safety, however, the proprietor allowed the unfortunate man more freedom, and suffered no one to abuse him.

He was treated as a drudge, to be sure, and given only coarse food, and worked day and night, but he was not confined, and had the society of others; was allowed to go and come about the house and grounds, and was treated more like an insane, harmless pauper, than as a dangerous maniac.

He was never allowed to leave the grounds, and for a long time he did not seem to care to do so, his treatment being so much better than it had been.

At last, however, the tide of reason once more turning toward his brain, the longing to be free seized upon him, and with great cunning he made his preparations to escape.

He did so, but was unfortunately seen by Robert, who knocked him down, and had him taken back, giving orders that he should be more strictly treated.

He went to the place oftener than usual, and was always called Mr. Mason, and treated with the utmost respect, for he was rich, and owned several shares of the Great Northwestern Railway Company's stock, or at least drew interest upon them.

His father, meanwhile, had grown very shrewd, and often pretended to be insane when he was not, in order to be exempt from punishment, and by this means he learned many things.

By-and-by the hypocritical superintendent died, and the asylum was given up.

Robert's father, being considered past recovery, and a very improbable person to cause him any further trouble, was removed to a State institution, where his board cost Robert nothing, it having been said that the patient's relatives had long since died.

Here the poor man had more peace, and had a chance to know more of the world.

He used to see Steve go by the building, and became greatly excited, spending hours in thinking out the problem.

At last he solved it, saying to himself that if his boy lived that was certainly he, and no one else, and he got to knowing just when Steve's train came by, and always watched for it, no matter what time it might be, whether by day or night.

He made friends among the helpers, who regarded him as harmless, and they would often read to him, or give him papers to read himself.

After a year or so more Mason used often to meet a man outside of the asylum walls, right under the patient's window, and it was in this way that he got to knowing the scoundrel's plot.

He got one of the cook's to post a letter for him—this being the strange warning sent to Mr. Franklyn—and while watching for Steve's engine, saw Mason go by in a locomotive.

With him was the man he had previously talked to under the walls, and also a young girl, evidently a prisoner, and he knew at once that Mason had succeeded in carrying out a part of his plot.

He at once set about writing a letter, which he tied to a billet of wood taken from the stove, and had not much more than time enough to throw it in at the cab window of the first locomotive that passed.

Seeing Steve, he determined to escape, and did so after a while, but was discovered and pursued by the cruel mob.

After a long chase, during which the poor man thought he would be retaken more than once, though he resolved to die sooner than live longer in an asylum, he came across Steve, as we have seen.

Truly, it was a marvelous reunion!

Father and son brought together after long years of separation, and both in pursuit of one of their own blood!

CHAPTER VII.

OUR HERO'S EARLY LIFE—FALLEN AMONG THIEVES—THE HARD LOT OF A HOMELESS WAIF.

WHAT had been Steve's experience during all these years?

What sort of a childhood and boyhood had he passed?

Had his lines been cast in pleasant places, or otherwise?

For the most part his life had been pleasant.

We will now narrate his early history as briefly as possible.

A little child not quite three years old, having no knowledge whatever of the world, knowing nothing of the evil passions which animate the minds of some men, guileless himself, suspecting no one. Such was Stephen at the time his father was hurried away to the asylum.

It was the intention of his wicked brother to do away with both the father and child at one and the same time, but chance or Providence—it was hard to say which—interfered in a strange way.

It might have been chance, but in after years, when Steve knew all the circumstances, he was apt to regard it as a special act of Providence that his brother's evil designs had been thwarted.

Early that very evening, some hours previous to the time that his father was spirited away, the child was playing about the house, when it was attracted to the window by the sound of music.

It was a circus procession or a torchlight parade—something of the sort—and the boy was charmed by the lights, the music, and above all, the glittering dresses of the marching men.

The door leading to the street, left open by some careless servant, invited the admiring child to take a nearer view of the marvelous pageant, and in an instant the boy was in the midst of the throng upon the sidewalk.

Nobody noticed him, and as the procession moved on, he followed after, looking on delightedly, and enjoying a keen sense of freedom at being out in the busy street, a forbidden region to him hitherto, unless accompanied by one of the servants, or, perchance, his father.

He hurried on, pushed and jostled by the crowd, and before long the brilliant procession turned down a side street, and was lost to sight.

He hastened after it, but in crossing the street was knocked down and nearly run over by a heavy wagon, the driver stopping his horses just in time to prevent them from trampling on the child's curly head.

Someone snatched him from under the feet of the horses and helped him across the street. The lights of the procession were visible far down the crowded thoroughfare, and breaking away from his preserver, the little fellow ran after them.

It was growing quite dark, and soon the boy found himself in a quiet street, all alone, and the lights far away in the distance.

The street lamps bewildered him, and for a long time he followed them, until at last, worn out and utterly confused, he began to be frightened, and thought of returning home.

Knowing not the slightest thing about the direction, too shy to ask the way, and thoroughly frightened at the predicament, the poor boy walked wearily on, completely exhausted, and scarcely able to drag one foot after the other.

He had no hat, and the night air was cold and piercing, added to which a drizzling rain set in, and a damp, uncomfortable fog settled upon the city, making the lights look blurred and hazy, or just as he had often seen the stars through his tears.

The tears began to flow fast now, and the lights danced about in a crazy sort of way, which frightened him, and made him try to get rid of them.

On and on he walked, thinking only of getting home, and going to sleep in his little white bed up-stairs, where the pretty moon was

went to look in upon him, smiling in his sleep; but the more he walked, the further away he got, and now the streets were narrow and dirty, and the houses mean and shabby.

At last he fell upon a doorstep and went to sleep, remaining there undisturbed until the morning came with the chill rain and the unwholesome fog all about him.

In the early morning it chanced that an enterprising ragpicker, coming that way, espied the neat clothes and gold ornaments of the little wanderer, and conceived the brilliant idea of making a change.

The pretty outside garments of rich cloth and velvet were quickly stripped off and stowed away in a capacious bag; the gold locket and shoulder clasps were removed and pocketed, and then, as if to further enrich himself, the man laughed softly as he gazed at the silken tresses, looking like spun gold, falling upon the boy's shoulders.

"I might as well make all I can out of him," he muttered. "He don't belong here, that's clear, and if I don't, others will, so what's the harm."

He took a pair of long, sharp shears from one of his numerous pockets, and in a twinkling the golden locks were shorn close to the boy's head, and carefully wrapped up in an old newspaper.

Worth five dollars, if they're worth a cent," he growled. "Might as well make all I can. He'd cost me more than that to advertise him. Ha, ha! I've made a good beginning. Nothing like being up betimes. The early bird catches the worm. Ha, ha! so much the worse for the worm!"

Later on, when the rays of the sun began to straggle down into the street in a hesitating sort of way, as if half ashamed of themselves, the slovenly woman who called herself mistress of the house came out to see if the cats had drank up the milk, and chanced to see the child sleeping on the doorstep.

"Hum! somebody's been here before me!" she growled. "Guess there ain't much left for me."

The child's underclothes were of fine material, delicately made, and his shoes were almost new and of the finest kind. They would do first rate for her own brats—so she designated them—still sleeping up in the dingy garret.

"People've no business to be rich if they can't take care of their things; they don't deserve to have 'em anyhow, when there's so many poor folks!"

With this philosophical remark, the good creature proceeded to divest the child of his shoes, stockings and underclothes, down to his very shirt, a dainty thing of soft flannel, lined with fleece and trimmed with lace.

It would never do to leave this; so hastily snatching the sleepy child in her brawny arms, she carried him into the house.

"Fair exchange is no robbery," she said, "an' it's mighty easin' to the conscience, besides."

With this, she clothed the boy in rough, soiled, tattered garments, and carried him out into the street.

"It's a mercy he sleeps so sound," she muttered. "Poor brat; he must be tired out. It's all the same to me, though. My young ones will have something better to wear now."

A shabby-looking huckster's cart was standing not far off, and into this the woman bundled the child, covering him up with a lot of old bags.

"Let him have a ride; he's used to it, I suppose," she laughed, and then hurried back into the house unnoticed.

It happened along in the forenoon, not a great while from twelve o'clock, that the driver of a certain vegetable wagon, as he was riding along a country road some miles from the city, was astonished at hearing the sound of a child crying.

There would have been nothing strange in that if there had been any child in sight, but as there was no house within half a mile, and nobody within hearing distance, it was rather remarkable.

The sound was repeated, and turning around, the man saw a child sitting up in his wagon, crying bitterly.

"Halloo—halloo! What's this?" he said, very much astonished. "Some of those city brats has been and crawled into my wagon and gone to sleep! Who are ye, young one, and where d'ye live."

"Want to go home!" sobbed the boy.

"What's your name?"

"Teddy. Want to go home."

"Teddy what?"

"Dunno. Papa's lost; want to go home."

"Who is your father?"

"He's papa, that's all, and I'm hungry and want to go home!"

"Do you live in the city?"

"Dunno, but I want to go home!" and then the poor child began to cry afresh.

"Come, come! You mustn't do that, you know," said the man, beginning to get cross. "Here's a piece of bread I saved from my breakfast; eat that."

"Want some milk!" sobbed the boy, "and want to go home!"

"Well, you can't now, so you might as well stop bawling. If you don't want the bread, I'll eat it myself," and he did so forthwith.

Inquiry in the city failed to determine the identity of the child, and he was taken care of by the farmer's wife, who had half a dozen of her own already, and was hard pushed to keep them clothed and fed.

She demurred at having another little responsibility added to her list, and vowed she would not put up with it.

The new child was cross, and wouldn't be satisfied, and she wasn't going to bother with him. He was most likely some sailor's brat, she said, because his arm was tattooed, and she wasn't going to look after any sailors' children, if she knew herself.

The child, left to himself, wandered off one day, determined to find its home, but when night came he was further away than ever, and tired out, half sick and utterly wretched, fell asleep on the steps of the county poor-house.

Six years passed away, and during that time the son of one of the wealthiest men in the State was living in the poor-house, uncared for, unloved, a waif and a drudge.

Poor boy! Many were the bitter tears he shed over his sad lot; but as the time passed he forgot his kind father, and remembered only that he was a homeless waif—a child of the poor-house!

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE IN THE POOR-HOUSE—DELIVERED.

WHEN our hero was about ten years old he was removed from the county poor-house, where he had lived so long, to a State institution many miles away.

Hard as had been his lot at Redmond's, it was still worse in his new quarters.

He was ill-treated, knocked about, and used more like a miserable dog than a sentient human creature endowed with reason and understanding.

The keeper of the place—a brutal fellow called Harrington—was never satisfied unless he was venting his spite upon Ned, as the boy was called, and he got as much work out of him as he would a man.

The boy had to chop wood, carry coal, look after the horses and cattle, draw water and do a hundred other things; rising early and going to bed late, working like a mule, and receiving not a word of thanks, but only kicks, blows and hard words.

The boy rebelled at this treatment, and once or twice attempted to run away.

He was brought back upon every occasion and received a severe beating, together with the pleasing information that if he did not behave himself he would fare the worse for it, and one day get into prison, and if he did not fetch up on the gallows he would be lucky indeed.

One day, when he was about twelve years old, one of the horses got out of the stable and ran away, being found an hour or so afterward on the railroad track with a broken leg.

It was not the boy's fault, but Harrington swore horribly at him, and said he would take it out of his hide, as he elegantly expressed it.

He got down a huge raw-hide whip, which he was wont to use upon refractory paupers, and meeting the boy in the hall, seized him by the collar, dragged him into a large empty room, locked the door, and proceeded to lay about his legs and shoulders for the cruel treatment.

"I'll teach you to take better care of the horses, you young viper," he said, with a terrible oath, plying the whip vigorously and pulling the boy off his feet.

The lad was boiling over with indignation, and slipping out of his jacket, retreated to the further end of the room.

"If you don't stop abusing me, old Harrington, I'll complain to the inspectors, see if I don't," said the lad, rubbing his smarting legs and stifling his sobs.

"You will, will you, you young devil?"

"Yes, I will. It was all your own fault that Dan got out, and you know it."

"All my fault, was it?"

"Yes, it was; and it ain't the first time I've been licked for your blunders."

"No; and it won't be the last, either!" growled the brute, advancing. "I'll tame you if I have to kill you!"

"Don't you dare come near me, Tom Harrington!" said the boy, with snapping eyes and quickening pulse, his anger thoroughly aroused, "or somebody besides me may be killed! I've stood your nonsense just as long as I'm going to."

"We'll see about that," and the man prepared for a rush.

"Look out, I tell you, for I won't be responsible for what happens, if you touch me again."

Unheeding the warning, the brute sprang at the boy, aiming a wicked blow at his head, but the latter dodged, and, quick as thought, seized the whip from his tormentor's hand, and struck him across the face with it.

Harrington howled and cursed, and tried to dodge, but his intended victim was as spry as a kitten, and danced all around him, slashing him on the legs, arms, back, chest, hands, head and face, just wherever he happened to hit.

Harrington called lustily for help, never having imagined that the lad possessed so much spunk, and the boy, hearing the sound of voices outside, and knowing that there would be no mercy for him if once caught, made a dash for the window and bounded through at one leap, carrying the sash with him.

The door was broken open, and the men started in pursuit of the lad, just as a middle-aged gentleman came walking up the path leading to the front door.

He was nearly upset by the lad, but catching the latter by the arm, he said kindly, though loudly:

"Hi-hi, my boy! what's your hurry? You ought to look where you are going."

"Don't—don't!" cried Steve, in terror; "please let me go, sir; they will kill me, if they catch me!"

"Who will?" asked the gentleman, still holding the boy by the arm.

"Tom Harrington and the men!"

"Oh, I guess not; if I have any say in the matter, they won't touch a hair of your head."

"Oh, but they will—I know they will, because I struck him!"

"Struck him, eh? That's good. Did you strike Tom Harrington?"

"Yes, sir."

"He struck first, I suppose?"

"Yes, he did; and he said he'd kill me, and it wasn't my fault at all, and I told him to let me alone, and when he tried to hit me again, I snatched the whip out of his hand and let him have it good."

"Is this the whip?" for the boy still held the formidable weapon.

"Yes, sir."

"That's a pretty thing to strike a boy with. I'm glad you let him have it, my lad, for a man that will strike any one with that, whether he deserves a licking or not, ought to have a double dose."

"Let me go now, sir, won't you?" pleaded the boy, looking earnestly into the man's kindly face. "I'm going to run away sure this time. I'm plenty old enough to earn my own living and be treated decent, and I'm going to leave here forever."

"Wait a minute, my lad, wait a minute. I want to talk to Tom Harrington, and here he comes."

"Oh, dear, he'll lock me up and give me nothing to eat, and beat me and half kill me, and I'll never get another chance to run away as long as I live."

"Keep quiet, my boy; he won't touch you, not the least bit. I've got the whip, and if he tries any dodges on me, he'll find he's waked up the wrong passenger."

At this moment Harrington approached.

"So you've caught the young devil, have you?" he said. "I am glad of it. He'll come to the gallows some day. Just look at my face, where the young imp struck me with that whip."

"Served you right, too."

"What's that? Do you know who you're talking to?"

"Perfectly. You are known as the greatest brute for miles around. Now—now, don't look black at me, 'cause I won't stand it. If you try to run on the same track as me there'll be a smash up."

"What do you want?"

"I came to get a nice clever boy, and I guess this fellow will do as well as any. I want a full surrender, because I intend to adopt him."

"You'd better not take him, then, for he'll give you lots of trouble, and you'll be sorry for it."

"I'll risk that. Parents living?"

"No, he's a nobody; found on a door step; nice kind for you to take, I must say. Nobody knows what sort of parents he might have had."

"Never you mind that; just come into the office, and draw up the papers, give the lad a better lot of clothes till I can get him home, and I won't ask any odds of you."

Harrington led the way to the office, the gentleman following with Steve.

"Are you going to take me away, sir?" asked the boy.

"Yes; you're my boy. I've been looking for you a long time, and now I intend to be a true father to you."

"I never supposed I had a father; everybody said I hadn't."

"Well, you have, my fine fellow, for I'm your father. You've got good stuff in you, and all we've got to do is to fetch it out."

Not daring to trust the lad with Harrington a minute, the gentleman superintended Steve's bath, handing him his clean clothes as they were needed.

He was very much delighted to find a locomotive tattooed upon the boy's arm, and would not have parted with him after that for a large sum of money.

"Stephen Price, you've got hold of a treasure," he said to himself.

"That boy is the son of an engineer, and how he ever came into this place I don't know; maybe he was stolen. The boy's head struck me as good in the first place, and now I am sure he's the very boy I want."

Stephen Price was a railroad engineer; he and his good wife were childless, and wanted someone to adopt; hence Mr. Price's visit to the poor-house.

He had intended to take a younger boy than Steve, but the discovery he had made decided him at once, and in two hours the boy was legally his, and he was on his way home with him.

"You will remember, will you, that your name is Stephen, just like mine, won't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that I'm your father?"

"Yes, sir; I won't forget that, for it makes me feel so happy."

"And you'll forget that place back there, where I found you, and be a smart, honest boy, so that I'll never be sorry I hunted you up."

"Don't be afraid of that, sir; I'd do anything in the world to please you, just for taking me away from Tom Harrington."

CHAPTER IX.

STEVE BECOMES AN ENGINEER—THE MAN ON THE TRACK.

WHEN Mr. Price reached the city where he lived, he took Steve to the hair-dresser's, clothier's, furnishing store and hatter's, and gave him a complete new outfit from head to foot.

Dressed in an elegantly fitting suit of clothes, shapely boots upon his feet, a neat hat on his head, with clean linen, and a natty tie, Steve looked as much different from his old self as could be imagined.

He was not at all awkward, and one could see at a glance that he was a born gentleman, and that he had never lost that true grace which no amount of artificial polish can counterfeit.

Steve was delighted with himself, and made up his mind to please his new-found father as much as he could.

He never doubted for an instant that Mr. Price was his father, and that he had long been searching for, and had at last found him.

When the engineer reached home, he told Steve that he was going to see his mother, and then they walked into the parlor where, soon afterwards, a handsome, motherly-looking woman entered.

This was the engineer's wife, and as kind a soul as ever lived.

"Mother," said Mr. Price, leading Steve forward, "this is our boy, our Stephen, and I'm going to make an engineer out of him."

The kind-hearted lady took Steve in her arms and kissed him, while the tears rolled down her rosy cheeks in perfect showers.

"God bless him," she said, "what a fine, big, brave, beautiful fellow he is."

Steve hardly knew what to make of his kind reception, and thought he had never been so happy before in all his life.

He was at once installed in the household, Mr. Price explaining matters privately to his wife and saying that Steve must never know but what they were his own parents.

In order that the gossips might not get to talking with the boy, and let out the secret, the whole family moved far away, and Mr. Price got on another railroad, Steve being put to school.

He was given special instruction, and soon developed an extraordinary aptitude for mechanics, and his father spared no expense to make him a first-class mechanical engineer, at the same time seeing that his other studies were not neglected.

By the time he was eighteen, Steve could run an engine as well as any one, and knew everything about it; could tell if anything was out of order and how to remedy it; and was, in fact, not only the very prince of engineers, but was an excellent machinist besides.

He was called Stephen Price, and very few persons beside Mr. Franklyn knew that he was not the son of the retired engineer, and they kept the secret inviolate.

Mason did not know it; and although the boy's face always called up unpleasant memories, he never suspected the youth's identity, believing that his younger brother had been drowned.

He had looked for the child when he had returned from the asylum, and had been told that it was missing. Afterwards a body was found in the river, which coincided with the boy's description, the clothes being identified by the servants.

The face was hardly recognizable, having been eaten by fishes, but the villain was sure that the body was that of his brother, and a splendid funeral was made for it.

The villain knew not that among the spectators that watched the funeral procession leave the church, was a hard-featured, coarse-looking woman, who made no effort to restrain her tears as the little coffin passed out.

"It serves me right," she said, "for treating the poor boy so, but, at any rate, the child will have a better burial than I could ever give him. I wonder what became of the right one? Poor dear, there may be trouble for him some day. Well—well, it's the way of the world."

And this is how our hero came to be Engineer Steve, and how he happened to meet Ida Franklyn, and fall in love with her; how he chanced to see the wild eyes of the half-crazed prisoner looking out at him as he drove by on the iron horse, and how he came to be on the track of his own brother.

The howling crowd who had hunted down the poor maniac, was left far behind as Steve crossed the bridge, and the young man had his poor father removed to the baggage-car where he was well taken care of.

Frank Haydon, the messenger boy, attended to all his wants, the detectives chatting with him, meanwhile, and finding him exceedingly rational.

Mr. Franklyn returned to the cab, in order to talk with Steve about their plans.

"I don't know now whether it will be necessary to go at such a high rate of speed, seeing that the man has left his engine," said Steve. "If he does go on to the Bluffs he will be arrested."

"There is no other road he can branch off on without going there or running back to Porter's."

"And we know that he has not done that, because he is hereabouts. The lines are in good condition to there, and we have already telegraphed to all stations west of Yankee Switch to stop him, so that there seems to be no chance of his trying to double on us, and make his way back to the southern terminus."

"He might try to do so."

"I hardly think so, sir. He will be most likely to attempt to reach the sea-board, for once upon the ocean our chance of catching him would be small."

"Then we must take every precaution."

"Certainly; and therefore I intend to run slower and keep a lookout for my man. When we reach Butler, just beyond here, I think we had better drop one of our detectives and let him attend strictly to telegraphing."

"Not a bad idea."

"The second man we will send down the road as far as Porter's, so that he can keep a watch over the Muddy Run road and its branches as well as ours. Mason may attempt to carry his prisoner

across the country to the Swallowtail Branch of the Muddy Run road, and thence reach the coast."

"It will be a long detour for him, and will bring him a hundred miles lower down than the Bluffs. There are no streams running from that point."

"There are lots of sailing vessels, bound for China, the Sandwich Islands, Australia and other places."

"He must not escape; my darling is lost to me forever if he does!"

"You think my plan a good one, then?"

"Yes."

They were going along at about forty miles an hour, and running very smoothly, Steve keeping up the speed, and talking at the same time, without any difficulty.

"'Tis strange," he said, suddenly, after a pause.

"What's strange?"

"The locomotive and the letters on my arm. I always thought 'E. S.' stood for Engineer Steve. I know I asked my father once, and he said that was right. He laughed, though, and perhaps only meant it for a joke."

"The letters are undoubtedly the initials of your name."

"They used to call me Ned before my father found me in that dreadful place, which I now can scarcely remember."

"They may have known your name, but probably they did not. Edward is a common enough name, and they probably gave it to you because there was the letter 'E' on your arm."

"Do you know the poor man in the car, my real father?"

"No; though it seems as if I must; maybe when he comes more to himself I shall be able to recognize him. It is only about ten years ago that I became president of the road, and previous to that my acquaintance with the various minor officials was but slight."

They were running ahead, and had just rounded a curve, one of the few sharp ones on the road, when, by the glare of the head-light, Steve saw that which made his blood run cold.

"My God!" he cried, in agony, clapping on the patent air-brakes as quick as lightning and shutting off steam.

"What's the matter, Steve?"

"Look ahead, there, sir!"

"I see nothing."

"On the track."

"Merciful Heaven! a man tied down to the rails!"

"This is more of that villain, Mason's work."

"You can stop in season?"

"I hope so, though we're on a down-grade."

"We're going slower."

"Yes, I've shut off my steam. It's well we were not running at eighty miles."

Just ahead of them, fastened to the track, was the body of a man.

He was alive, for, bound and helpless as he was, he was struggling wildly to free himself.

His agonized cries for help rang out upon the night air, fairly making one shudder to hear them.

He was in a desperate strait, and the chances of saving him were few indeed.

Steve saw that the impetus of his train would carry it down upon the man, even with the brakes on, and nothing could save him.

He had seen the man's danger, applied the brakes, realized the uselessness of the move, and resolved upon another expedient, all in less than a minute.

"Look after him, Tim," he suddenly shouted, and springing from the engine, which was still going at a good speed, bounded down the track like a deer.

Heaven help him and the unfortunate man if he stumbles.

He runs like the wind, the broad track of light making his figure most distinct and sharp against the darkness.

He reaches the man on the track, and bids him to take courage.

He gives one glance at the man's face as he whips out his ever-ready pocket knife.

It is the face of the engineer, the man who was with Mason on the runaway locomotive.

"There has been mutiny here, or maybe the rebellion of an outraged conscience, and Mason has sought to put the man out of the way."

Steve had not a moment to lose, the locomotive being but twenty feet away.

With movements as swift as lightning, and as sure, he cut the man's cords and dragged him from the track, just as the train rolled by, slowly, to be sure, but fast enough to have killed them, had they been in its way.

"This is Mason's work?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"He and the fireman have taken the young lady with them to Butler, where they intend to get an engine and run on to Rockwell's, if possible."

"They know I am in pursuit?"

"Yes, but thought they had got rid of you."

"Then they do not know that I am again on their track?"

"No."

"I trust they will not find it out until I overtake them. You and Mason had some trouble?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I will tell you."

"Ha-ha! they have stopped, and are backing down for us."

The engine soon drew up to where Steve and the rescued man were standing.

"Ah, Forbes," said Mr. Franklyn, "you had a narrow escape."

"Mr. Franklyn," said the man, "I have done wrong, and desire to make amends. I allowed myself to be humbugged by a villain. Now I mean to hunt him down, and bring him to punishment."

"Where is he?"

"Not ten miles ahead, and with nothing but a hand-car."

CHAPTER X.

THE ENGINEER'S STORY—THE VILLAIN STILL AT LARGE.

FORBES got aboard the locomotive, and took Tim Leonard's place, in order to give the latter a chance to rest. Steve really needed it as much, if not more than anyone, but he was not satisfied to be idle while the villain was still at large, and he refused all offers to put someone else in his place for an hour or so, while he slept.

"How did you happen to be in such a predicament, Forbes?" he asked, after they got started again.

"We had a falling out, Mason and I, after he sent the engine back after you and the fireman. Jack Morton will take my place; he's no good, though he thinks he's a better engineer than I am, or even better than you. I like the cheek of the fellow."

"How did it all happen?"

"Well, I'll tell you just how the thing started from the beginning, so that you can understand the whole business."

"In the first place, Mason and the young lady got on the train down below when I started off. Of course, I did not know that anything was wrong. Neither did the conductor, until we got to two stations beyond Hayfield, where our train was to lay over."

"There had been an accident there, and the wires were all down, but I thought that something was crooked, and pretty soon Mason admitted as much, and asked me if I would run a special train for him, offering me a tidy little sum in payment."

"I accepted, but the conductor kicked, and we started off without him, and no one in the train but two brakemen, Jack and myself, and Mason and Miss Ida. At Redmond's the coal gave out, and we put the engine on a siding, and walked to Norman's Bend."

"How about the track over Pine Tree Run?" asked Steve.

"It was mighty shaky when we got there, for the water had arisen and undermined the foundation. I did not want to run across, for I was afraid we'd go down."

"Mason swore that we should go over, whether or not; and said that if the track fell, so much the better, for then no one could follow us. He said he was running away with the girl, and he wasn't going to be caught."

"I said we would cross in a boat, and walk to Yankee Switch, where we could pick up an engine, and go ahead; but he wouldn't have it, and said we'd lose time."

"Of course Miss Ida never suspected anything, and didn't know about the track being in a bad way, and wondered why we were stopping there. I ran back a mile or so, and then clapping on all the steam I could get, fastening down the valve, howled along, and got over in safety."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Mr. Franklyn, devoutly.

"I felt the track shake as we went over," continued the engineer, "and we'd no more than passed before the whole thing fell in with a terrible crash, going to the bottom, sixty feet below, all in a heap. We got to Yankee Switch all right, but couldn't get a mite of coal. You see, I'd used up a lot in getting up steam to go across the Run."

"We ran on to Redmond's, and then had no coal, no engine, no nothing. We contrived to get on a siding, and then started to walk to Norman's Bend."

"Part of the way we walked, and part rode on a hand-car. We got a single engine, and started off, but before long saw that you were chasing us."

"I wanted to give up then, but the infernal scamp said he'd see me roasted first. He told Miss Ida that he was running off with her, and that she'd got to marry him. She was strapped down to my seat, and though I knew she was frightened, she never flinched."

"When he saw you a-coming for us, he turned as white as a sheet, and declared that you should never catch him; that he'd kill you first. He knew it was you, for no one else could run so fast; and we saw that the engine was that new-fangled arrangement of Fountain's, and so was sure of it, 'cause I knew that nobody but Steve Price, the Prince of the Rail, could manage it."

"Then he said we must stop you even if we sacrificed our own engine; and then he told me to shut off steam so we could get off, and then to start her up again, the other way, and then to let her run like mischief."

"I didn't want to do it, but he was bound I should. I stopped, and we all got out, and then Jack managed to get an awful pressure and reverse her, jumping off as she puffed away, going like the wind."

"We started to walk then, and the way that poor young lady suffered just riled me. I got as mad as a yellow jacket hornet, and if it hadn't been for Miss Ida, I ain't sure but I'd have sworn as hard as I knew how."

"Then, too, the way they served that poor old bridge-tender made me sick of the whole business, and I was bound I'd shake 'em."

"I was sorry I'd ever had anything to do with them, and told Mason that I'd see him in the very middle of the bad place before I'd do another thing for him."

"I took the money he'd given me, and, rolling it up in a wad, threw it at him, taking him right in the eye with it, and making him swear like a trooper."

"Then I started off down the track, expecting that you were all smashed up, but he said something to Jack mighty quick, and in a jiffy the two unnatural wretches jumped on me and had me down."

"The young lady screamed and implored them not to hurt me."

"'You mind your own business,' snarled Mason, 'and I'll settle this fellow!'"

"'What are you going to do?' I asked him, for he had tied my arms with my belt strap, and he and Jack were picking me up."

"'I'm going to lay you on the track,' he says, in a tone that made me shiver all over, 'and the first train that comes along will settle your case, once for all.'"

"I never squealed yet whenever I got into danger, but the idea of the thing was so horrible that I just screamed right out."

"'For the love of God, Mason, don't do that!' I said, with no voice at all, for I was awfully scared. 'If you must kill me, do it quick. I ain't afraid to die, but it's horrible to leave the world in that fashion.'"

"He only laughed, and then he and Jack, the monsters, laid me right across the cold track with my face to the stars, and tied me down with straps, ropes, and what-not."

"'Ha-ha, Mr. John Forbes,' said Mason, with a laugh like a devil's, 'you'll find what it is to go back on Bob Mason.'"

"I didn't answer a word, 'cause I knew 'twas no use."

"'When you hear the rails a rattling, and see the glaring head-light in your face,' he said, with another laugh, 'when you feel the hot breath of the iron-horse scorching you, when the wheels crash over you, and grind the life out of you, think of Bob Mason.'"

"The inhuman fiend!" said Steve, with a shudder; "what crimes is such a man not capable of?"

"Then he went off, he and Jack, carrying the young lady with 'em and she a-screaming for them to save my life. I guess they must have gagged her, for pretty soon she suddenly stopped and I heard nothing but the wind."

"They had gagged me, but I made out to slip the gag down so that

I could breathe and make a noise, though I knew it would do me no good."

"It was a mighty lonely part of the road there, just around the sharp curve, and no one would be likely to come along the track, and, as it was dark, they wouldn't see me from the bank above."

"Well, sir, I lay there, thinking a lot and trying my best to get away, but 'twas no use, and I knew that I'd run my last engine."

"After a while I heard an awful noise, like an explosion, and couldn't think what it was, unless you'd been run into by that engine and thrown from the track."

"It was the locomotive itself that exploded," explained Steve. "We piled up a lot of stuff, threw her down the embankment, and then started ahead after this villain."

"I thought, then, that as you'd been smashed up, I was safe for a while, because there was no other train due for some hours and maybe I might get free by that time."

"Then after another while, which seemed like an age to me, I heard the shriek of an engine, and then the rattle of the rails."

"I knew that all was up with me then, and I just shouted as loud as I could, feeling dead sure that I wouldn't be heard, but for all that making up my mind to do all I could to save myself."

"Well, you got me out of the worst scrape I was ever in, and I shall never forget it as long as I live," said Forbes, concluding his narrative, "and as for that cold-blooded, inhuman brute of a Bob Mason, just let me get my hands on him once, and his life won't even be worth insuring, not even at a hundred per cent. premium."

"Do you know what his plans are?" asked Mr. Franklyn.

"He means to get to Butler, and steal an engine to take him to Rockwell's. It's only fifty miles or even less, and from there he'll get a steamer to China or Australia; there's two sailing to-morrow."

"He won't run back to Porter's, will he?"

"Probably not, though he would have jumped off there, and switched off on the Muddy Run branch, if he'd known you were so close behind. He'd only do that in case of an emergency, anyhow, cause he'd lose time by it, unless you were sure to catch him on the Northwestern."

"That's just what I mean to do," spoke up Steve. "We'd better send a man back there in case he does try to double on us."

"Yes, I think so myself."

"There's our station, just ahead of us," said Forbes, suddenly.

"Now we'll find out if he's gone or not."

Sure enough, Butler was in sight, and in another moment the train ran into the depot and stopped.

There was a great crowd at the station eager to hear the news.

The culprit had not been seen, and word had been sent from Rockwell's that it was not likely he was on the road, and that the superintendents at the lower stations had better keep a sharp lookout.

A train was ordered to be made up, so that one officer could go back to Porter's; but when the engine-house was entered, it was found that the best locomotive had been taken out unknown to the keeper, who was found lying drunk on the floor.

"This is more of Mason's work," said Steve. "He's free again, and with that engine will be able to make excellent time; but if he beats me, I'll give up at once my title of Prince of the Rail!"

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER MESSAGE—MORE INTERRUPTIONS.

THERE were two entrances to the engine-house, so that a locomotive going either up or down could run into it, and it was not very large, as trains generally passed through the place without laying over at night.

The engine had been stolen from the upper end of the house, and evidently by a man that understood what he was about, for no one seemed to know anything concerning it, and those who saw the smoke thought that the keeper was at work there, and paid no particular attention.

It was expected that the scamp would come by train, and when the whistle of Steve's engine was heard, and he was seen approaching, a crowd gathered, supposing, of course, that the villain would be aboard, and that they should have a chance to see him.

"We have no time to lose now," said Steve, "we must go ahead. Let two men stay here, one going to Porter's, by the next regular train due here at midnight. It can be signaled to stop, and take him on. I will look after my engine while you are telegraphing. You can

send Frank to the office. You will telegraph to Rockwell's to stop every train that comes in."

"Yes; and for all captains of steamers to be sure of their passengers before they let them aboard."

"He mustn't get away from the police when his engine arrives. Better have them dispatch an engine down the track to look out for anything suspicious."

"I'll do so."

When all arrangements had been made, the train started on again with Steve and Leonard in the cab, and Mr. Franklyn, Mr. Locke, Forbes, the engineer, Frank Haydon, the poor lunatic, and one detective in the passenger car, a good rate of speed being kept up, the young engineer not caring to go too fast.

"We've got a little less than fifty miles to go, Leonard," he said; "and we don't want to smash things up to do it, either."

"You think you can catch him?"

"I haven't any doubt of it. I'll do it if he tears up every rail between here and Rockwell's."

"Gosh!"

"Easy, Tim, easy; we don't want to go more than a thirty-mile rate, for there's too many curves in this part of the road to suit me. Then, if there's anything in the way, I want to see it."

"Gosh a'mighty! Steve Price, if you ain't the very king-pin of engine-drivers, I'll sell out. Here you've been running all day, besides what you did this morning before we started, and you're as fresh as a daisy yet. I don't see how you stand it."

"I've got to stand it, for there's no one else to take my place."

"That's so; there ain't."

"Not but what there's just as good engineers as I am on the road, but Mr. Franklyn don't want any one else, and I wouldn't be anywhere else just now for a good deal, unless it was alongside those two villains."

"You think a great deal of Mr. Franklyn, don't you, Steve?"

"Yes, but a great deal more of his—halloo! what's that?"

"I don't see nothing."

"I do, then; someone is signaling for us to stop."

Steve applied the brakes, and the train soon came to a standstill.

Mr. Franklyn came to the door of the car, and asked what was the matter.

"Someone hailing us, sir. I'll run ahead easy a bit."

Slowly the engine went ahead, and pretty soon Steve saw the swinging light which had first induced him to stop.

"Halloo! What's the matter? Who's there?"

"Telegraph operator at Buzzard's Peak," cried a man with a lantern coming up the track.

"What's wrong?"

"Is Mr. Franklyn aboard your train?"

"Yes."

"You're Steve Price, or Engineer Steve, are you not?"

"Yes, but what's the trouble?"

"I've got a dispatch for Mr. Franklyn; it's particular. It went to Rockwell's first, and then was sent back with orders to stop him."

"Have they caught Mason?"

"No, not yet. He must have gone by here. I saw a single engine go past, and thought it was you."

"Frank," called Steve, "is Mr. Franklyn there?"

"He's right inside."

"Tell him to come out; there's a message for him."

In a moment the millionaire appeared, and the operator handed him the message.

He broke the seal, and, by the light of the man's lantern, read the dispatch, his hands trembling and his face paling.

He was greatly agitated, and Steve could see by his excitement that something terrible and totally unexpected had happened.

The president read the message through, and for a minute or so said nothing, appearing to be unwilling to trust himself to speak until he could control his emotions.

"Is it anything bad, sir; any danger to Miss Ida?" asked Steve.

"No, thank Heaven, it is not; the blow has fallen upon me this time, and not upon my child."

Then he remained silent for a moment, while he controlled himself with difficulty.

"Send for Mr. Locke," he said.

Frank was dispatched for the secretary of the road, and the latter quickly made his appearance.

"Read that, my friend," and the president handed the dispatch to Mr. Locke.

"Good Heaven! What's this? We are ruined!"

"Read it aloud."

Mr. Locke adjusted his spectacles, and read as follows:

"To Franklyn, Pres't, N. W. R'y.

"Mason has embezzled a large amount, nearly all our available funds, in fact. Probably between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand dollars, including bonds and various valuable shares and stock. Cash alone will amount to forty thousand dollars. Drew a large amount from bank this morning to pay employees, and has taken that."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Steve. "We must get hold of him now, sure. Your daughter traveling with a thief! It must not be."

"This is worse than I had anticipated, and if we do not overtake the rascal the road is ruined."

"I will catch him, Mr. Franklyn, never fear."

"Do so, my lad, and I will make your fortune."

"All aboard!" shouted the young man. "Pile her in, Leonard, all she'll hold; we've got to overhaul that rascal at all hazards!"

The engine shrieked and puffed, the heavy clouds of smoke streamed out, and the steam hissed and spat, as the train hurried along over the track.

There was a double aim in view now, for not only was Franklyn's child in peril, but his business honor also.

Mason had been greatly trusted, and had taken advantage of this to seize upon the funds of the corporation and the president's daughter at the same time.

He meant to offset one with the other, give up the young lady and keep the money, or *vice versa*; if the road would not compromise, then he would keep both young lady and money.

He was an accomplished scoundrel, was Mason, and had so worked his points that he felt sure of something out of his desperate game. He was playing for high stakes, and was therefore willing to risk considerable.

Away they rattled, around sharp corners, over creeks and gullies, through little mountain hamlets, startling the echoes with their shrieks, and making the woods ring with their din.

Suddenly, as they rounded a curve, Leonard gives a cry:

"Gosh!"

"What's the matter, Tim?"

"Look ahead! Stop her!"

Steve shut down on the brakes.

"Don't you see that red lantern?"

"Yes."

"That means danger."

"So it does, and, by George, there is danger ahead, and no mistake. It's lucky I stopped."

It was indeed lucky, for within ten feet of where Steve's engine came to a halt a huge boulder had been rolled upon the track in such a way as to have caused destruction to the train had the latter struck it.

The train had stopped, and Mr. Franklyn and the others stood around the engine, discussing the situation.

Steve had a long pole cut, and putting every man to work, he soon had the satisfaction of knowing that he could go ahead, the stone being removed.

It took some time to do all this, and the delay could be little afforded, Mr. Franklyn fretting and fuming like a caged lion, and hurrying the work all he could.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, and Steve calculated that they could reach the terminus by eleven or even before that, which would give them considerable time, notwithstanding the delays, as no steamers would sail before sunrise.

Steve was beginning to feel somewhat exhausted, in spite of his determination to keep up, and he had to force himself to work in order to keep awake.

"By Jove! Leonard, only ten miles more," he said, at length.

"Is that all?"

"That's all. Only ten miles, and nothing seen of that scoundrel yet. He'll be hauled up at Rockwell's, sure."

For a time there is silence.

Then the fireman suddenly breaks it with a startled exclamation:

"Gosh!"

Steve knows at once by this monosyllabic expletive that something is the matter, as Leonard never uses it unless there is.

"What is it, Tim?" asks Steve, arousing himself.

"Reverse your engine—quick!"

It is done in an instant.

"What is it?"

"There's another train on this track, and she's coming toward us as fast as she can rattle!"

CHAPTER XII.

MORE DETENTIONS—MISSING.

"So there is!"

"Were not all trains ordered stopped until we passed over the road?"

"Yes."

"Then what's this one doing on the track?"

"Another of Mason's dodges, no doubt; call for Frank."

"Hi, you Frank, oh, Frank—Frank Haydon! Come here this minute!"

"What's the matter?" asked the boy, appearing.

"Steve wants you."

"What is it, Steve?"

"Get a red lantern, and light it."

"Yes, get some of that red oil and put it in your lantern, Frank," added Leonard, laughing.

"You go to thunder!" retorted Frank; "you'd do to make a green light with!" and with that he disappeared.

The other train could be seen approaching, but Steve put on all the steam his engine could stand, and in a few minutes the distance was considerably widened between the two.

Then he came to a stop, and called Frank.

"Run ahead as fast as you can and stop the train."

"Ay—ay, Steve!"

"Swing your lantern like a good fellow, and holler like mad!"

"I'll stop 'em if there's any stop to 'em!" cried Frank, hurrying up the track.

"Make 'em toot when they do stop, and I'll come up!" shouted Steve, as the boy bounded off.

"All right!" called back Frank, the red lantern swinging back and forth as he hurried along.

With the speed of a deer he hastened on, and soon he could hear the noise of the approaching train, and then, as it came around a curve, see the gleam of the head-light.

He waved his lantern furiously over his head, standing at one side of the track, and shouted at the top of his voice.

On came the train and swept by him, and he was afraid his signal would not be heeded, and that there would be a collision.

He shouted louder than ever, and ran along by the side of the train, still waving his lantern.

"Hold on, there, or you'll run into Steve, and get smashed into everlasting bits!" he yelled excitedly.

To his great delight he saw that the engine was slowing up, and when the last car was about two hundred feet ahead of him it came to a standstill.

He ran along, and when he reached the head of the train, explained matters to the engineer.

The latter gave the signal agreed upon, and in a few moments Steve's engine came along slowly, stopping within a few feet of the other.

"What's the matter?" asked Steve. "All trains were ordered off this part of the track until we had passed over."

"A dispatch came to us half an hour ago, to send a train down as fast as we could, saying that you were wrecked below Butler, and signed by Mr. Franklyn."

"A dispatch?"

"Yes."

"Have you it with you?"

"Yes; here it is."

"This is more of that scamp's tricks. Don't you see that this was sent from the next station ahead of us?"

"Yes; but we didn't think anything of that."

"It's lucky we were on the lookout for danger, or we'd have been wrecked. Did you see a single locomotive anywhere on the road?"

"Yes, there was one standing on the track at the next station."

"Run back as fast as you can and go on the siding; then, after we've passed, run down to Butler, take on a special detective you will find there, and go ahead to Porter's; then await orders."

"All right."

"Is that correct, Mr. Franklyn?" asked Steve.

"Perfectly so. I rely upon your judgment in this matter."

The two trains started on again, both making good speed.

"Gosh!" said Leonard, "this beats the Dutch. There's one thing that knocks me, though."

"What is it?"

"The putting of that red light—the regular danger signal—on that rock back there. Somebody is trying to help us, apparently, but they are as mysterious as the Old Boy himself."

"It is strange, but no doubt we shall find out all about it by-and-by."

"Do you think we shall catch Mason before he gets into Rockwell's?"

"Can't say; though I am afraid not. We'll do it in the morning, though, see if we don't."

"Catch him, you mean?"

"Yes."

Half an hour later the lights of the thriving little seaport town of Rockwell's Bluffs were visible, and the exciting journey was almost at an end.

There was one very sharp curve—a most dangerous one, too—and then a little dark tunnel, cut through the solid rock, after passing which there was but a quarter of a mile to be traveled over before they would run into the yard.

After passing the curve the lights would be lost sight of for a few minutes, so when Steve saw them first he began to slow up, although he started around the curve at a pretty good jog.

He was half way around when he saw by the glare of the light a freight car standing right on the track—not on one of the many sidings, but directly in his way.

There was no time to do anything, and destruction stared him in the face.

If he tried to apply the brakes while the train was on the curve it might be thrown from the track, and if he did not there would be a collision.

He decided to run the latter risk.

"Jump out, Leonard, jump!" he cried; "we're bound to have a smash."

He jumped himself, and evidently escaped uninjured.

Leonard sprang out, and shouted a warning to the occupants of the car.

Then there came a terrible crash and a jar that shook every man from his seat, broke all the glass, put out the lamps, and bounced the fire out of the stoves.

The pilot of the locomotive struck into the freight car and smashed the platform, the smokestack was badly battered, and the engine otherwise injured.

Fortunately there was no telescoping, but the passenger car jumped the track and caught fire, the occupants hurriedly making their escape before anything serious occurred.

The locomotive had driven the car ahead of it around the curve and partly into the tunnel, but when Mr. Franklyn got out he could see nobody in sight, and called to Steve to know what was the matter.

There was no answer, and he called again to know where Steve was.

Then Tim Leonard was heard calling for assistance.

Frank Haydon and Forbes followed the sound of his voice, and presently found him lying on the side of the track with his right leg broken.

"How did it happen, Tim?" asked the messenger boy, and the fireman told him.

"Where is Steve?"

"I don't know. He jumped first, and I thought he got out all right, but I haven't seen anything of him since."

Tim was lifted up and carried along the track to where Mr. Franklyn was, but nothing was seen or heard of Steve, and whether he had been killed or had fallen into a hole, or had gone on for help they could not tell.

"If he was anywhere about we should see him," said Mr. Franklyn, "for there's plenty of light."

"Here's somebody coming through the tunnel now," said Forbes.

Several men now approached, but they were employees of the railroad, and, attracted by the noise and the light, had come to ascertain the cause.

They had none of them seen Steve, and the affair became more mysterious than ever.

"Has there been a train or an engine in waiting the last half hour?" asked Mr. Franklyn.

"No, sir. There was one sent out after you, and no watch was set until you should be heard from again," said one of the yard men.

The party set out to walk through the tunnel, and they had emerged and were in plain sight of the station before it was discovered that the half-insane man whom Steve had rescued from his cruel persecutors was not with them.

He had left the car with the rest, seeming to be as sane as any of the number, and doing his utmost to discover what had become of Steve.

He had started with the others to walk to the station, but was now missing, and so strangely and unaccountably, that they were all completely bewildered.

"This seems to be a night of mysteries," said Mr. Franklyn; "but perhaps the poor man has gone off to find his son."

"His son?" echoed the rest.

"Certainly. I firmly believe that this unfortunate creature is the father of our Steve."

"We must try and find him as soon as we can get help," said Mr. Locke, "for his brave conduct to-day has placed us in his debt, and we would be ungrateful indeed if we allowed him to fall into danger."

In a few moments they reached the depot, causing great excitement and astonishment by their sudden and unexpected arrival.

Nothing was known of Mason.

He had not been seen; neither had Miss Ida Franklyn, and the whole affair was clothed in mystery. The police had been warned to look out for him, and also the captains of the steamers who were to sail in the morning, but as yet no suspicious persons had presented themselves.

Search was at once instituted for Steve, but he was not found, although the search was continued for an hour or more.

Mr. Franklyn ordered the regular running of trains on schedule time, but telegraphed back to his detectives to keep a sharp lookout, and not let Mason return on that road, nor get off on any other.

Tim Leonard's leg was set and he was made comfortable, but the chances were that he would be laid up with it for two or three weeks, and the prospects were not encouraging.

And thus matters stood.

Steve was missing and the villain was still at large, having in his possession thousands of dollars belonging to the railroad, and, more precious than all, the beloved child of the millionaire.

"Assure as my name is Frank Haydon," said that individual, "I am going to follow up the lead taken by Engineer Steve, and if I don't find him I'll run across this rascally Mason, and do some retributive justice on my own account. He called me a fool once, and I have never forgotten nor forgiven it."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BROTHERS MEET FACE TO FACE.

WHAT had become of Steve?

When he had jumped from the locomotive he had alighted squarely on his feet without hurting himself, though he was obliged to run a few steps to keep from falling.

Suddenly two or three men sprang upon him, and before he could cry out or offer any resistance a coat was thrown over his head, and his arms pinioned behind him.

He was then hurried swiftly along in the direction of the tunnel, one man grasping each elbow and hastening his movements.

He missed his footing several times and thought he should fall upon the track, but his guides prevented such an accident by keeping a firm hold upon him, and dragging him along whether he made a misstep or not.

He had no idea where he was going, for the sudden assault had confused him, and being so completely blinded by the coat thrown over his head, could not tell if he was in the tunnel or not.

He could scarcely breathe at the best, and after a few minutes of

the violent exercise forced upon him by his captors, he began to feel exhausted.

Over rough gravel, railroad ties, rails and switches they hurried him until he was about ready to drop, the sweat pouring from his body and his heart throbbing like an engine.

His throat became hot and parched, and breathing was painful, every inhalation seeming to send a knife thrust into his side.

The men who had seized him made no stop nor pause, but hurried on, notwithstanding his stumbling, until, when the unfortunate fellow thought he should certainly fall to pieces, they suddenly came to a pause for a moment.

Then they passed through a door, or, at least, Steve thought they did, for he heard one slammed behind him, and in another minute or so he was thrown rudely upon a hard floor, and left to himself.

The place was dark and damp and smelled of smoke and cinders, which convinced Steve that he must be in one of the store chambers leading off from the tunnel and built into the heavy walls of masonry which lined it, having for one side the solid rock.

In this particular he was right, but the chamber was one that had been so long unused that its very existence had been forgotten.

The entrance to it led off from one of the niches in the wall made for the accommodation of the employees of the road, and into which they could step when a train was passing.

There were many of these little nooks, and one could hardly be told from another in the darkness.

Only a person intimately acquainted with the tunnel, and having a knowledge of the changes constantly going on in it, would have been able to find the place, and but few of the freight-handlers and yard-men knew more than one-half of the secret places in the tunnel.

Steve himself could not tell where he was, being still blinded and in the dark, and he doubted if he ever could find the place again provided he made his escape.

After a little he felt someone remove his coat from his head, and then he was lifted up, placed on a bench and securely tied down.

There was a dim light burning and he could distinguish the forms of three persons, two men and a woman.

Could the villains have brought Miss Franklyn to this underground den?

He could not see the woman's face, and she appeared rather taller than Miss Franklyn, though that might be because he was sitting down.

He determined to hazard an inquiry, at all events.

"Is that you, Miss Franklyn?" he asked.

"No, it isn't!" said a harsh voice, and the woman turned towards him.

"Don't you wish you might find her?" asked one of the men with a cruel laugh.

Steve recognized the man by his voice, which he had often heard.

It was Mason, the abductor and defaulter!

The other man was probably Jack, the fireman.

Who the woman was Steve could not tell, not recollecting to have ever seen her before.

She was probably some hardened creature whom Mason had hired to look after the unfortunate young lady he had stolen from her father until he could embark upon the steamer, provided he was not prevented.

"What have you done with her?" said Steve.

"Never you mind. You'll have enough to do to look after yourself, without bothering other people."

"You're a villain, and the officers are on your track. I know your whole fiendish scheme from beginning to end!"

"You do, do you?" sneered Mason.

"Yes."

"You're wonderfully smart, ain't you?"

"I ought to be. I've had training enough in that direction."

"You're not as clever as you think."

"In the first place," said Steve, "your name is not Mason!"

This was shot number one.

It had its effect, for Steve could see the villain bite his lips and give a slight start.

"In the next place, you have long been plotting against the liberty, if not the life of your own father, and in your secret heart feel yourself to be the murderer of your younger brother."

Shot number two.

It told even better than the first, for Mason broke out with a volley of terrible oaths.

"It's a lie—miserable falsehood!" he roared; "the boy was drowned; I had nothing to do with it. He strayed from the house and fell into the river."

The woman, who had been intently listening all the time, but saying nothing, here smiled—a hard, crafty smile—as if she knew more than she cared to tell about the matter in question.

"You have stolen the funds of the Great Northwestern Railway, and the money is now in your possession," continued the young engineer.

Shot number three.

"Curse your knowledge, you imp of Satan!" cried Mason; "where did you learn so much?"

"Your father has escaped from the insane asylum, where you have kept him so many years, knows all your plans, and is even now upon your track."

Shot number four.

"Confound you and him both. I'm a match for you all. The girl is mine, the money is mine, and before twenty-four hours have passed I will be out of your reach. You can't frighten me with what you know."

"You murdered the bridge-keeper at Norman's Gully, just ahead of the Bend. You tied Forbes to the track. You placed all sorts of obstructions in our way. You tried to throw us from the rails. You stole a locomotive, and you are even now plotting more mischief."

A whole volley of shots—a perfect broadside.

"You are right," said Mason; "and the first thing I'm going to do is to get you out of the way. You're the worst enemy I have, because you are the shrewdest."

"What would you do?"

"Kill you!"

"And add another crime to your already long list?"

"Yes; one or two more can't make any difference."

At this the man laughed, and was joined by the fireman, the woman only smiling that hard smile of hers.

"Have you any choice of deaths?" asked the wretch of Steve.

"Let it be speedy if you are determined to kill me, but beware how you peril your own soul by additional crimes."

"You needn't worry about me! You just look out for yourself. You'd like to be killed quick, eh?"

"Yes."

"Ha-ha! that's just the reason why I am going to make a slow job of it, so you can enjoy yourself better."

"Fiend!" muttered Steve.

"And while you are having a good time," continued Mason, with a brutal laugh, "I'll sit back here and take it all in, fancying myself an old Roman senator watching a dying gladiator. Maybe you fancy I haven't the courage to torture a man to death?" he hissed.

"You certainly have the inclination to do so, though I would not call it courage myself."

"Call it what you like, I don't care! Anything, so long as I get you out of the way! There is plenty of time to do it in, and I'm going to make the most of every minute."

The woman still stood at one side, but neither said nor did anything, listening with stolid indifference to all that was said, except at such times when she smiled that terrible smile.

Had she no heart?

Would she listen unmoved to the declaration by one man that he intended to kill another?

Would she make no effort to prevent this horrible crime?

It seemed not.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jack. "How'll you manage it?"

"I've got a way," answered Mason, sententiously.

"Lay him on the track?"

"No."

"Blow his brains out?"

"No."

"Stick a knife in him?"

"No."

"Hang him?"

"No."

"Poison him?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Tear him to pieces!"

"What?"

Mason repeated the words, hissing them from between his clenched teeth, while his eyes glared like a wild beast.

"Get a stout rope, a good long one; you'll find all you want back in there."

Jack disappeared in the darkness, taking a small lantern with him, and after an absence of a few minutes returned, bringing the rope.

"Throw an end over the beam up there, double it so as to get more strength, and keep it loose so you can hoist on it."

"You ain't going to hang him, are you?"

"No; I told you once I wasn't."

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll see! Have you got the rope all fixed?"

"Yes."

"Now fetch out that old platform for weighing iron pigs on, the swinging one, I mean."

Jack brought out from some recess a wooden platform about three feet square, having four iron rods fastened at each corner and meeting together in an iron ring about three feet above the center.

This was used with portable scales, and was intended for weighing bags of grain, pigs of iron and things of that sort where large amounts were weighed.

What was Mason going to do with this?

"Fetch the young rascal out here."

The order was obeyed, and Steve was brought out and placed under the beam.

"Fasten the rope around his arms," said Mason, "and pin his hands down. That's it. Now hoist and fasten your rope tight."

Steve was suspended about four feet from the floor, and to his wrists were tied ropes hanging by his sides, the use of which he could not understand.

His legs were securely strapped, and around his ankles was a heavier rope about which another was passed hanging downward between his feet.

"Now bring out your scale."

Jack brought the scale and passed the hanging rope through the iron ring, lashing it securely.

The scale now hung about a foot clear of the floor, and in itself was considerable of a weight.

Steve's coat and vest had been taken off, leaving him in his shirt, trousers and shoes; but evidently Mason was not satisfied with that, for he ordered Jack to cut away the sleeves of the youth's shirt.

"I want to see the beautiful muscles straighten out," he said, "and the red blood come to the surface, and gush out in a crimson flood."

Jack tore away Steve's shirt, and uttered a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter?" asked Mason.

"Come here and see. He's tattooed on his arm."

Mason grabbed up a lantern, and held it to Steve's arm, so that the letters and the locomotive showed plainly.

"My God!" he exclaimed, nearly dropping the lantern. "Where did you get those marks?"

"My father put them there."

"Ha—ha! I see—I see! The brat never died, and I buried some one else's child! Curse you, Edgar Stevenson, you are my own brother that I thought dead fifteen years ago. This time I will make sure of my work!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SAVED BY THE MEMORIES OF BYGONE DAYS.

"CHUCK on all the stuff you can find, Jack!" cried Mason. "Let's see how much he can stand."

The man got a lot of old couplings, pieces of rails, spikes and other rubbish, and piled them on the scale.

Steve saw at once what was the villain's intention.

He meant to pull his joints apart, and in that way tear him to pieces.

"More—more! you haven't half enough yet!" yelled Mason excitedly.

Jack dragged out more old pieces, and piled them on the scale.

The weight began to tell on Steve's legs, and the scale nearly reached the floor, the ropes having stretched considerably.

"Pile on more! the blood don't begin to show yet."

Heavier grew the pile, and Steve could almost hear his joints crack under the weight.

"More yet—more yet!"

The pile increased, and there was room yet for more.

"Pile her up—easy, not too fast. Let him feel how that pulls for a little while."

It was an idea that the arch fiend himself might have conceived.

It was the very refinement of cruelty.

The weight was terrible, and the poor fellow felt as if his feet would be pulled off.

The ropes cut into his ankles and caused him intense pain; his muscles, drawn out to their fullest extent, seemed threatening to snap, while the blood was almost bursting out in a red flood.

Mason stood by, smiling at his victim's agony, and became enraged because he uttered no cry for mercy.

Though the pain was intense Steve made no sign; but closing his lips firmly, gave utterance to not a groan or the least expression of pain.

It was hard not to show the torture he felt in his face, but he did not, and almost smiled, though the strain was horrible.

"Hang weights on his arms!" said the villain. "He don't begin to suffer yet what I intend he shall!"

The miserable hireling obeyed his master's orders, and heavy weights were hung from Steve's wrists.

He thought his arms would be pulled from their sockets, but still he made no sound.

"Ha, the scale touches the floor! That won't do. We must hoist him up higher."

"We can't do it with all that weight on it."

"Pshaw! take another turn of the rope and we can do it easy enough."

The rope was unfastened and the two villains, by tremendous exertion, aided by mechanical appliances, hoisted the poor fellow about a foot higher and made all fast.

"Slap on more weight!"

"The scale won't hold it, the ropes are strained now as much as they can stand."

"Hang more upon his arms, then."

It was done.

A groan escaped Steve's lips, the first he had uttered.

Mason laughed like a fiend incarnate.

"Ha-ha! I knew we could fetch him," he said, with a chuckle.

All this time the woman had stood looking on and saying not a word.

Was she, too, a fiend?

Had she no heart, no tender feelings, no pity for the poor lad who was thus being slowly tortured before her eyes?

It would appear not.

"You seem to like it, don't you?" laughed Mason, gazing at Steve, whose veins were swelled to a terrible extent.

"Now we'll vary the exercises a little," he continued, drawing a sharp knife from his pocket and unclasping it.

"What are you going to do?"

"Don't you see how much blood he's got?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to let out some."

"He will bleed to death."

"What if he does?"

"That is an easy death."

"Ha! ha! so it is. But never fear, he shall have torture enough before I get through with him."

"What will you do?"

"Cut the cords of his arms and legs, and sever his joints. Didn't I say I would pull him to pieces?" continued the brute, gnashing his teeth with rage.

"For Heaven's sake, Mason, kill me at once and end my misery!" said Steve, scarcely able to speak.

"Ha—ha! he appeals for mercy—he asks me to spare him, but I won't. I won't let up on him the least grain. He stands in my way, and must be put out of it."

He advanced upon Steve with the knife in his hand, and a horrible smile distorting his features.

Then for the first time the woman moved.

For the first time during this horrible ordeal she spoke.

Advancing quickly, she stood between Steve and his tormentor.

"You have done enough," she said, quietly.

"Stand aside, woman."

"I will not."

"Let me finish my work."

"No."

"Stand aside, I tell you!"

"I will not."

"Then I'll make you!"

"You cannot."

"Here, you, Jack, pull this vixen out of the way."

"You bet!"

"Don't you dare come near me, you viper!" said the woman.

The viper did go near her, but the very instant he put his hand upon her the woman's fist flew out straight and swift, and taking him square between the eyes, sent him spinning backward, causing the blood to flow freely, and making him see stars.

"You she wolf!" hissed Mason, "we will see who is boss here."

He rushed upon her with the drawn knife tightly clasped in his hand, a baleful light in his eyes, and his lips covered with foam.

Quick as a flash the woman caught him by the wrist and gave it a sudden twist which made him howl with pain.

The knife fell from his grasp, and whirling him around, the woman then sent him spinning into a corner.

He fell upon the body of Jack, who was still very much dazed, and hardly knew where he was.

He thought a house had fallen upon him.

The woman snatched up the knife in a twinkling, and passed the blade over the ropes tied about Steve's ankles.

The threads parted with a snap, and another swift slash severed the rope entirely.

The scale, with its load of iron, fell to the floor with a crash.

One sweep of the knife over the cords on his wrists and the weights on his arms followed the others.

The ropes around his body were quickly cut and he dropped to the floor.

Then the woman cut the rope which held Steve suspended, and quickly catching him in her arms, prevented him from falling.

The reaction was for the moment almost as bad as what had gone before, and the boy's limbs, freed from the cords and weights, were racked with terrible pains.

The blood rushed from his mouth and nostrils, and he fainted away in the woman's arms.

She quickly laid him down upon a rude bench in one corner of the place, and began chafing his arms.

"Confound your meddling!" said Mason, arising to his feet and coming forward. "What do you mean by cheating me out of my revenge?"

"Don't you come near me, you scoundrel, or I'll put an end to your miserable existence. If you wanted to kill the lad, why didn't you do it at once?"

"Because I did not choose to, that's why, my little beauty."

"Look you, Robert Stevenson," she said, as Steve seemed reviving, "I never crossed you, have assisted you in your horrible schemes, and have looked on while your victims suffered, and never opened my mouth."

"So you have."

"When you first brought this lad here I did not know him, and cared as little what became of him as a spider cares for a fly."

"Well?"

"I found out who he was, and even then was not particularly moved by his sufferings."

"No, you rather seemed to enjoy them."

"As long as I saw he could endure without crying out I held my peace, but when you wanted to torture him I wouldn't stand it."

"Mighty soft-hearted all of a sudden."

"Listen to me, Robert Stevenson," continued the woman, "and listen you also, Edgar Stevenson," for Steve had opened his eyes and was regarding her with a look of wonder in his handsome face.

"Go ahead," said Mason.

"Fifteen years ago a pretty child was found one morning asleep on my door-step. Some thief had cut off his curls and stolen his gold ornaments. I was a poor woman with a drunken husband to sup-

port, and plenty of mouths to feed besides. I finished the work already begun and stole the child's clothes, dropping him unseen into a huckster's cart."

"Is that all?"

"No; my own boy, not much older than this poor child, was given the clothes I had stolen, and he took great pride in them. The next day he fell into the river and was drowned!"

"Served you right, you hag."

"It did, and I bowed to the will of Heaven. My child was buried as the son of a rich man. His child, your brother, still lives, and is called Engineer Steve."

"Curse him! Why didn't I look for the mark on his arm?"

"I knew that at once, for no two boys would be marked exactly the same, and this is the lad whom, when a child, I robbed. Do you think I have no heart, Bob Mason, as you call yourself? Do you think I could see that child tortured? The face of my own dead child, as beloved as ever child was, looked down in sorrow upon me, and told me to stop this horrible murder! Do whatever else you like, Bob Mason, but harm Engineer Steve at your peril!"

CHAPTER XV.

STEVE MAKES AN APPEAL AND RECEIVES A VISITOR.

JACK had by this time got up from the floor, and came toward the woman with clenched fists and trembling lips.

"You miserable hag!" he cried; "how dare you strike me like that?"

"Don't shake your fist at me or I'll give you another crack that you won't get over so soon. I wasn't born and reared in the worst part of Springdale for nothing. Let me tell you, Mr. Jack, that I fear no one, and if you dare breathe or whisper anything disrespectful to or about me you'll be sorry! Remember!"

With this the woman turned on her heel, and gave her entire attention to Steve, who was still weak and excessively nervous, administering a drink of brandy from a flask she carried in her pocket.

"I am glad the stuff is of use to somebody," she said, replacing the flask in her pocket. "I'd be better off without it, I suppose, but I haven't the courage to leave it off—no, nor the inclination, either."

She sat on the floor beside the bench where Steve lay, and put her hand upon the lad's throbbing temples, spoke to him soothingly, and finally rolled up the coarse shawl she wore over her shoulders and made a pillow of it, raising his head as tenderly as the fondest mother in the land could have done.

"See here, Bob Mason," she said, after a short pause, "you can count on me for assistance. You have never had cause to complain before, I imagine. They call me a woman with a hard heart; so I am, but there is a soft spot in everyone's bosom. That spot has been touched in me. I'm bad enough, I know, but if anything happens to Steve Price, or Edgar Stevenson, as he really is, unless he has a fair show for himself, I will ruin you forever!"

"Would you let him escape, after his telling all he knows about me?"

"I would give him a fair and square chance for his life. On even terms you are no match for him, and you know it."

"If he gets away, he will bring the whole place about my ears. You're a queer one, and I can't see why you should defend him; but once you get your mind set on anything, there's no changing you."

"No, there isn't."

"If you say that there's nothing to be done to him, all right, but my safety must be looked after as well as his."

"What of that?"

"If you will keep him here all right until I get away, very well. I don't know as I care whether he lives or dies after I get off with the girl and the cash."

"Hum!" was the brief response.

"Now that the old man is loose, and Edgar knows everything, there's no use in trying to get the inheritance, I suppose. Anyhow, I've enjoyed it all these years just the same, and I'm quite satisfied."

"You're a clever scoundrel!"

"Thank you; highly flattered, I'm sure. You'll see that he stays here until I'm off?"

"I won't let him out myself. If he gets out in spite of me, I can't help it, as I know of."

"Consume you! would you play me false after all?"

"No."

"You promise not to let him get away until I'm safe out of the country?"

"Yes."

"You swear it?"

"Yes."

"That is sufficient."

"You had better be careful. The tunnel will be watched, and as soon as you attempt to escape you will be nabbed."

"There is the other way, leading up through the sew—"

"Sh! Be careful!" said the woman, nodding her head toward Steve.

He had been intently listening, for though still too weak and exhausted to move, his reasoning faculties were in good condition.

"All right," said Mason, with a laugh. "I forgot myself."

Jack, who had been cowed by the strange woman, who now appeared to be an entirely different person from what she had lately shown herself, relapsing into her old hard, cold state, now approached Mason, and whispered in his ear:

"Will you want me any longer, now that the job is finished?"

"Wait till I'm safely off."

"You haven't paid me yet."

"Here, then; there's enough to get out of the country;" and the man handed his tool a roll of bills. "You won't care to remain with the Great Northwestern Railway any longer, I suppose?"

"Well, I should guess not. That's why I think I'd better slope right away. I can run down the coast, get into California, and beat my way East. Once there, I'll be all right."

"Why don't you wait and see me off? I'll give you more when I know I'm all right."

"And run the risk of getting nabbed? Do you suppose they're going to let you walk quietly aboard that steamer with the gal, and sail away with her?"

"I can leave her, if necessary, for I've got the ducats. I'm bound to have one or t'other if not both."

"You'll be nabbed if you try the steamer, I tell you."

"Nonsense; didn't we arrange about the disguises in case it came to the scratch. One would think we hadn't been planning this thing for nearly a month. Old Moss won't go back on us, and when we go there for the girl—"

Jack gave the villain a nudge in the side.

"Move further off; that cuss on the bench hears every word you say," he whispered, winking toward Steve.

"Hum, I had forgotten," said Mason, moving away to the extreme end of the obscure room, preceded by Jack.

"You'll get yourself into trouble with your forgetfulness, if you ain't careful," said the man.

"Never mind me; I'm able to take care of myself."

"All right; I'm only putting you on your guard."

"You are not going to stay here all night, are you?" asked the woman, suddenly.

"No. Come along, Jack. Have you got the lantern?"

"Yes; I'm a Jack-o'-lantern to-night."

"So you are for treachery!" interposed the woman, as the two men passed out.

"Shall you keep me here and let those villains escape?" asked Steve, when they had gone.

"I must—I have sworn it."

"You will not interfere if there is a rescue attempted?"

"I will not assist you to get out."

"You will not attempt to hold me?"

"I may be overpowered in spite of myself," she said, mysteriously. Steve understood her meaning, and knew that if he would suddenly seize and bind the woman she would offer no resistance.

"Where is Miss Franklyn? In this place?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"Elsewhere."

"Has my bro—, has Mason gone there?"

"Yes."

"To the house of this man, Moss?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"On the bluff."

"Is Miss Franklyn there?"

"Quite likely."

"She is there—I know it," cried Steve, half rising in his excitement.

His strength was not sufficient, and he fell back again exhausted.

"Drink this, it will make you feel better," said the woman, handing him the flask of brandy, from which he took a deep draught.

"I must go there and save her."

"You could not do it."

"Why not?"

"You would fall on the track or in the street."

"Then I must get word to her father. She must be saved."

"It is useless to attempt it. It will be unnecessary besides."

"Why so?"

"Mason will not care to take the risk of getting her away. He would rather lose her than lose the money."

"He must have neither. She must be taken from him; I will go myself, weak as I am. Let me go."

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"I have sworn to keep you here."

"The oath is not binding."

"I dare not break it."

"Let me go to her; I would die if anything happened to her."

"Why are you so interested in her behalf?"

"Because I love her!"

"Does she return your love?"

"I know not; I care not. It is sufficient for me that I adore her with my whole heart and would willingly lay down my life if by so doing I could save her. You must let me go. I beg of you to release me; I can find my way, I will let Mason escape, but I cannot bear to see my darling come to harm!"

He spoke with a fervor and an earnestness that was positively thrilling. His passion illuminated his face as with a glowing light, and made him more truly handsome than he had ever been.

Even the woman was touched and turned away to conceal her emotion.

A fierce struggle was taking place in her breast between her better feelings and her fidelity to the villain whom she had sworn to aid.

She wished to assist Steve, but dared not break her promise to Mason.

Not that she feared him; it was a different feeling from that, it was a sort of sense of honor which is inherent in all but the most degraded and vile.

That Steve loved the millionaire's daughter was a new idea to her, never having imagined such a thing, and the knowledge of the fact did more to influence her than any amount of pity for him alone could have done.

"I dare not let you out," she said, "and besides that, Mason has the key of the door leading into the tunnel, and it is locked."

"There is another passage leading through the sewer."

"You could never find your way out. You would be stifled by the gas."

"I will do anything, dare anything to escape, only show me the way out."

"I cannot."

"You are then no longer my friend."

"Yes, I am. Stop, here is the brandy. Take it—keep it, it will do you good. Here is that villain's knife. You may want it."

"You are going to permit me to escape?"

"No, but I will not prevent your trying. Give me the bottle."

"What would you do?"

"Throw myself into a drunken sleep that you may not be disturbed in making your escape."

"No—no, I will not allow it. Mason or that villain Jack will discover you when they return and kill you in their rage!"

"It matters not. I would have done you a service."

"You shall not sacrifice yourself."

"Hark! What is that?"

There was a noise outside as of someone in the passage feeling his way along in the darkness.

"Tis Mason or maybe Jack returning."

"I will attack him," said Steve, "seize the key and free myself."

The noise increased, and suddenly a door at the end of the store-

room was thrown open, a young man appeared, and with a shout rushed forward and seized Steve by the hand!

It was Frank Haydon, the messenger boy!

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE VILLAIN'S TRACK—WATCHING AND WAITING—THE FIGHT IN THE TUNNEL—STEVE TO THE RESCUE.

THERE were others upon the track of Steve besides the plucky Frank Haydon, though the boy was not aware of it.

First, there was the poor, half-crazed maniac, Steve's father.

He had two missions to accomplish.

First the rescue of his son, next, vengeance upon Mason.

It mattered not that the man was his son, his hatred was just as bitter, just as fierce as if there had been no ties of blood between them.

Then there was Forbes, the engineer, whom Mason had bound to the railroad track.

Aside from his own personal motives of revenge, he was determined to do something towards apprehending the villain, in order to show Mr. Franklyn that he was honest in his assertions of repentance.

Then there were the president and secretary of the road, the detective, Mr. Bates, and the conductor and brakeman, to say nothing of all the good people of Rockwell's Bluffs, who had the welfare of the Great Northwestern Railway at heart.

Let us first follow the poor lunatic.

As soon as the train had stopped, brought to a sudden halt by its crashing into the freight car, he jumped to the ground, apprehending that some danger threatened Steve.

By the light of the locomotive, which was not immediately put out, he saw two forms hurrying along the track, bearing a third between them, whom he had not the least doubt was Steve.

With a wild leap and a cry of rage, he bounded after the retreating figures, and entering the tunnel, flew swiftly along the track, guided more by instinct than sight.

Before long the blaze from the burning car shone through the tunnel, making it light enough to see everything.

There was no one in sight, and with a puzzled look upon his face, he began searching in all the recesses, thinking that maybe the man had hidden there, in hopes of eluding his watchful gaze.

A long search revealed nothing.

He walked through the tunnel, listening for any suspicious sounds, but heard nothing.

Once he looked back, and, by the faint light, saw what seemed to be a boy following him.

He darted away in the darkness, and presently a turn in the tunnel hid him from view.

The boy was Frank Haydon.

Misunderstanding his motive, the man eluded him, and thus lost a good chance of finding Steve, for Frank had already found a clew.

He kept on and soon reached the end of the tunnel and saw the lights of the station ahead of him.

He saw Mr. Franklyn and his party approach, and hid himself until they had passed by, not caring to have them see him, as he was not looking for them, but for Mason and Jack.

"They are still in the tunnel; I know they have not gone out of it," he muttered. "They shall not escape me. I will watch, and when they attempt to come out—ha, ha! let the villains beware."

He glided back once more in the darkness and hid himself in one of the niches in the wall, watching, listening, waiting.

He was sure the men had not left the place, and made up his mind to stay there all night if necessary.

He had two motives in waiting.

One was to recover Steve, whom he looked upon as his truest and best friend.

The other was to avenge himself upon his false-hearted son, the scoundrel Mason.

He waited and waited but never once lost heart, never once thought that his waiting would be fruitless.

At last, after a long time, he heard footsteps approaching from within the tunnel.

There were two persons, and they were talking earnestly.

One voice he recognized instantly.

It was Mason's.

At last his patience would be rewarded; at last he would meet the dastard face to face.

From his place of concealment he listened intently as the steps came nearer and the voices sounded louder.

He nerved every muscle and fiber of his body for the conflict, knowing that it would be a desperate one.

He would have to encounter two men, both of whom, rendered reckless by crime, would risk anything, even human life to escape.

The men were almost abreast of him, and were hurrying on as if fearful of being detained.

They had no suspicion of his presence so near them, although they kept in the middle of the track.

Suddenly, with a cry like that of a wild beast, he sprang toward them.

They paused on the instant, and uttered an exclamation of surprise. Then one swung a lantern he carried, over his head, and threw the light upon the strange figure.

"Good Heaven, 'tis the lunatic!" cried Mason.

"Kill him!" said Jack; "if you don't, he will kill you!"

"So I will! Fiends and furies! I have left my knife behind!"

"Then look out for yourself, that's what I'm going to do!" said the man, and like the coward he was, he darted off in the direction of the town.

The maniac seized Mason, and the two grappled at once.

Each seemed bent on the other's destruction.

Each flew at the other's throat, and tried to choke his adversary.

Neither had a knife, or other offensive weapon, and both were forced to rely upon their natural strength and cunning.

The struggle was a desperate one, indeed.

It could have but one ending.

The death of one, or, perhaps, both of the combatants.

Both were strong men, and both determined to succeed.

One was moved by feelings of revenge, the outcome of a series of brutal persecutions at the hands of the other, extending over a period of fifteen years.

The other had everything to lose, if defeated; life, fortune, vengeance, and he fought with the ferocity of a wild cat.

Neither could seem to get the advantage, and they struggled and fought as never men fought before.

Across the tunnel and back again they moved, each having to feel for the other's throat, the light having been extinguished at the first onset by the maniac.

They clinch in a death-like grasp, and reel about like drunken men.

At last, by a clever movement, Mason succeeds in tripping his antagonist, and both fall heavily to the ground.

The maniac is the undermost man, and strikes his head heavily upon one of the steel rails.

A terrible, burning, blinding pain darts through his head, and then all is a blank.

His muscles relax, his hands fall limp at his side, and with a gasp he releases the villain who has fallen upon him.

"Curse the rattle-headed fool!" cried Mason, springing to his feet and bestowing a contemptuous kick upon his unconscious enemy.

He looks at him a moment, and then says, fiercely:

"I ought to have killed him long ago, and then it would have been an easy matter to dispute the boy's claim, provided he made one."

He listens, his sense of hearing being strained to its highest capacity, fancying that he had heard a suspicious sound, at the same time peering into the darkness of the tunnel.

"I could easily dash his brains out now, with a stone, or a stray coupling-iron," he said, "and no one be any the wiser."

He groped about, moving his feet from side to side, as if seeking some weapon with which to carry out his fell purpose.

His foot presently strikes some object, which jingles as he kicks it against the rail.

He reaches down, and presently finds and picks it up.

It is a large spike, used for fastening the rails to the ties.

"The very thing!" he mutters. "One blow and his troubles are over, and with them ends my anxiety."

He gropes his way to where the still senseless man lies on the track, feeling with his hands along the ground.

All at once he puts his hands into a pool of something slimy which adheres to his fingers.

"My God! it's blood!" he cries. "Perhaps the fool is already dead!"

He feels along with the other hand, and presently touches the man's face, which causes him to spring back in terror.

"Satan aid me!" he shrieks, "the man still breathes."

His startling cry is echoed by another, and he stops to listen.

"Hurry, Frank, hurry!" cries a voice, "he is right ahead of us! Follow the light!"

The voice is that of Engineer Steve, the villain's younger brother.

He carries a lantern and is accompanied by someone, evidently a boy, by his appearance.

"Curse that hag!" exclaims the man, "she has allowed the young viper to escape! There'll be the deuce and all to pay, now!"

"Stop—stop, you miserable villain, or I'll shoot!" cries Steve.

"Shoot and be blowed," yells Mason, starting off upon a run.

"Hurry, Frank, hurry, we may catch him yet!" shouts the brave fellow.

He darts ahead, keeping Mason in sight, but suddenly pauses, horror-struck at the sight which seems to stagnate his very blood and make his eyes start from their sockets.

A man lying across the track, his face pale and his eyes staring, and beside him a pool of clotted blood.

"Heaven have mercy!" cried the lad; "'tis my poor father, and that brute has murdered him!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FORBES AND MASON—HOW FRANK HAYDON GOT STEVE OUT OF THE TUNNEL—A REVELATION.

WHEN Mr. Franklyn and the others reached the town and had made all their arrangements for preventing the escape of the defaulter, Forbes, the engineer, determined to set out upon his own responsibility in pursuit of the rascal.

Procuring a pair of revolvers, he started down towards the depot, peering anxiously in the faces of the few loungers hanging about the place, thinking that Mason might conceive the sharp plan of appearing on the open street, which would have been the last thing to expect of him.

He did not find the man, however, and then he stood thinking for a moment.

"It's barely possible that he and that contemptible Jack have lugged Steve away somewhere," he muttered, "and why not in the tunnel? There are plenty of good places to hide if one only knows them."

As the thought passed through his mind he began slowly working towards the tunnel, and had gone about half the distance when he saw someone running toward him and heard the sound of voices.

The man was Jack the fireman.

Forbes knew that the man must know where Mason was, and so, whipping out one of his revolvers, he jumped in front of the fireman and shouted to him to halt.

Jack saw the revolver, and knew at once that he could not escape by force, and so he tried cunning.

"Mason is back there in the tunnel," he said, "and he has no pistols nor nothing. You can nab him as easily as you like."

Forbes thought the man was lying so that he might get away, and so, seizing him by the collar, he pulled him off toward the depot, saying:

"Never you mind about Mason. I've got you all right, and I'm going to see that you are locked up before I bother with anybody else. Trot along there, lively, or I'll lift the top of your head right off."

Jack was disappointed, for he wanted Mason caught so that he could get away himself, and, with the money given him, start in business somewhere in the East.

He saw at once that it was of no use to attempt to escape, for he knew Forbes to be a determined man, and one who would shoot at the slightest indication of an attempt to get away from him.

So he walked along quietly with Forbes—the latter, pistol in hand—grumbling to himself at his hard luck in having been caught so soon.

Forbes had no idea that Mason was back there in the tunnel, supposing that he had tried to stow away upon the steamer, so as to secure his plunder.

He was walking along easily, having his eye on the fireman, when he heard a sudden rush behind him.

He had hardly time to turn and see who was coming, when he was struck on the head with some blunt instrument.

His assailant was Mason, who had just broken away from Steve.

Forbes was not staggered by the first blow, and succeeded in firing two shots at Mason, neither of them taking effect.

He was about to fire another when a new enemy appeared.

This was the fireman.

Jack, hearing the disturbance, turned and saw what the matter was.

His first impulse was to make off.

Then seeing that he could help Mason without any danger to himself, he rushed up and struck Forbes a tremendous blow on the back of the neck that felled him to the earth like an ox.

The pistol dropped from his hand, and Mason picked it up, not thinking to look whether he had another or not.

"We must get out of this," he said to Jack; "that young imp has got somebody with him, and he fights like a lion."

Jack needed no hint to make him take to his heels, and away he ran, followed by Mason, leaving Forbes lying insensible upon the hard ground where he had fallen.

"How did you get in, Frank?" asked Steve, as his friend suddenly appeared in the old store-room.

"I'll tell you all about it. What has happened? What makes you lie stretched there?"

"That fellow, Mason, got the advantage of me and tried his best to kill me, but luckily I was rescued. I feel all broken up, and as if I was on fire. I shall get over it pretty soon, though, by going out into the air."

"Who is this woman?"

"Never mind me," said the woman, "but just tell me not to make a noise or you'll blow my brains out—say it."

Frank repeated the words.

"Now take that rope and tie me to the bench. Don't tie it too tight, nor so loose that I can pull away without hardly trying."

Frank looked at Steve inquiringly.

"Do as she says, Frank."

Frank obeyed, and bound the woman with a rope to a heavy cask standing near.

"You can drop your knife carelessly where I can manage to reach it with my foot."

"All right," answered Frank; "I'll do it when we go out."

"How did you manage to find me, Frank?" asked Steve, when the boy had finished his work.

"I'll tell you all about it," said he, and proceeded to relate how the car got on fire, and how, when the others had departed for the town, he had made up his mind to do a little detective business on his own account.

"You know I like you first rate," he continued, "and I was bound to do something to help you."

"So you have, Frank."

"I kind o' had an idea that Mason had lugged you off somewhere, and I knew that there were lots of places in this tunnel where a fellow could be hidden and nobody know anything about it."

"Indeed there are, Frank, and more than even I know of, as well acquainted with the road as I am."

"I got a lantern from the engineer, which luckily had not been smashed, and lighted it, sticking a lot of matches in my pocket at the same time."

"Keep them," said the woman, "they will come in handy maybe. You may have to blow something up."

"What does she mean?" asked Frank of Steve.

"I don't know."

"Well, I started off to hunt for you, swinging my lantern around and throwing the light into all sorts of dark places. I thought I saw a man once, but he jumped out of sight so quickly that I missed him. I was pretty sure it wasn't Mason, anyhow."

"Perhaps it was my father."

"Maybe so."

"Go ahead; how did you finally find me out?"

"I nosed around, first on one side and then on another, leaving nothing unexamined. Finally, I was looking at a place where there were footprints in the thick dust in one of the places where the men stand to let the trains go by."

"Yes."

"I saw that the hole was deeper than most of 'em, and I showed

my light clear in, and saw a door. I knew there were lots of old storage places here, and I looked to see what the number of it was."

"Did it have any?"

"Yes, but before I could tell what it was I heard somebody talking, and then heard a key in the lock."

"Mason, I suppose?"

"You can just bet I scooted out of that hole as quick as I knew how, and hiding the lantern under my coat, crouched up against the wall out of sight. Two men came out, and, sure enough, they were Mr. Mason and the fireman."

"Did they see you?"

"No, for they turned up toward the bluffs and I was hidden below them."

"What were they talking about?"

"About you, and the nice way in which they had fixed you. You wouldn't trouble them any more, they said, for they had you nicely locked in there where you couldn't get out to save your neck."

"They were too sure about that."

"They locked the door and carried off the key, but I watched 'em and saw which place they came out of, and as soon as they got half a dozen steps away, dodged into it as quick as lightning."

"You did not come in right away after me."

"No; 'cause the place was locked, but I just made up my mind to get in, and I knew how I was going to do it, too. First, I looked up and saw the number of the place so's I'd know it, and then started off toward the locomotive."

"What for?"

"To get your kit of tools what you tote around in the engine. I was afraid that the engine would bust before I could find 'em, but it didn't, and I got two or three files, a cold chisel, and a hammer, and started back."

"Queer things to pick a lock with."

"I didn't want to pick a lock, for I knew I couldn't do it."

"What then?"

"To cut the hinges. I saw they were old, and that the door jambs had shrunk away, leaving plenty of room to work."

"How did you manage?"

"Oh, I filed, and chisled, and hammered, and yanked, and it didn't take me near as long as I expected. I think I'd go into the burglary business if I could always do it as easily as that."

"Aha! Frank, you're too honest a boy for that," said Steve, laughing.

"It's not his father's fault," said the woman, suddenly.

"What do you mean?" said Steve.

"His father was a professional thief—a notorious burglar."

"I never had any father," said Frank, hotly, "at least, none that I ever knew anything about."

"I knew him well, and he can't be dead yet, unless some policeman has popped him over."

"What was he—a burglar?" said Frank.

"Ay; but neither his wife nor the neighbors knew anything about it. He meant to have brought you up to the business, too, but he was foiled, and you may thank Heaven that he was, and that you are an honest boy, as Steve says."

"Did you know him?"

"I did—all about him. Many a time I have hid him in my house when the police were after him."

"What was his name?"

"Never mind that; it would do you no good to know."

"How did he try to teach me his business?"

"When you were a little fellow seven years old he would pretend to play a comical game with you. He would put you through a little window into a closet, and then you would open the door and run out."

"I see."

"Then he would lock the door, and tell you to unlock it. He would try different kinds of locks, and would have two or three bolts, and teach you how to manage them all. Of course, the work could be done from the inside, but it was sometimes puzzling to know just how many bolts there were, and where they were put."

"Exactly; and he tried this little game upon somebody's house, letting me through the window."

"Yes; but you fell and hurt yourself, and your cries alarmed the house; and he, being unable to reach you, had to go off and leave you. He told his wife you'd been drowned, and that the body could not be found."

"And the people I was left with?"

"Would never give you up, and before long you seemed to forget everything that had happened. They moved away, too, and we lost all track of you. I have not seen you for nine or ten years, but I knew you in a second. I have not seen Mose—that is, your father, for four years, and I don't know whether he's dead or alive."

"This is very strange," said Frank. "I remember living with some people who said they were no relation to me, but who took care of and sent me to school, and then I got a place on the railroad, because Mr. Franklyn took a fancy to me. Is my name Frank Haydon?"

"Frank, but not Haydon. I suppose they gave you that for convenience."

"Let's get out of here, Frank," said Steve. "I feel able to walk now. We must do what we can to follow up that brute, Mason."

Steve managed to get along pretty well with Frank's help, and together they emerged from the store-room through a dark and narrow passage into the tunnel.

As they hurried along, they heard the sounds of a desperate struggle, and Steve, recognizing Mason by the light of the lantern, darted ahead, and came across the unconscious form of his poor father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STILL SEARCHING FOR MASON—THE MYSTERIOUS NOTE—"I WILL HAVE NO COMPROMISE"—A TERRIBLE SIGHT.

STEVE saw that the man was not dead, though sadly in need of assistance.

Stanching the blood with his handkerchief which he tore into strips and made into bandages, Steve dressed the poor man's wounds as well as he could, and then he and Frank bore him between them toward the station, where Steve intended to leave him until medical aid could be summoned.

It was while on their way thither that they came across Forbes.

"Here's more mischief!" said Steve. "The wretch seems to have his hand in to-night."

Forbes was only temporarily stunned, and he arose to his feet as Steve spoke.

"Put after Mason," he said. "He's going to some place where he has concealed Miss Franklyn. He means to go thence to the steamer, but that will be watched."

"Do you know the house, Frank? Old Moss' place? I heard him say he was going there."

"Yes, I do, it's a mile from here, and not far from the China Mail Steamship wharf."

"Go then, at once," said Forbes. "I will look after the old gentleman. Here's a revolver, Mason stole the other one, but he won't know you've got that and you can get the drop on him."

Steve took the weapon, and then he and Frank hurried away, while Forbes carried the poor wounded man to the depot, where he left him while he went for a surgeon.

Mr. Bates, the detective, was another person who determined to carry on the pursuit of the villains without regard to the plans of the others.

The question that most interested him was the recovery of the money.

While Forbes had been hunting for Mason, and Steve for Miss Franklyn, his idea was to seize the money, which must make, he was sure, quite a large package, and in all likelihood would be carried in a valise.

He apprehended that Mason would try and smuggle this aboard one of the steamers, and then get on board himself on the sly.

He therefore made the rounds of the wharves and visited the steamers that were to sail in the morning, paying particular attention to such baggage as had been left with the porter to be called for.

On the China steamer he ran across a small black valise with a strap attached to it, so that it could be slung over the shoulder, but there was no mark upon it by which it could be recognized.

It was locked so that no accident could have opened it and revealed the nature of its contents.

"When was that valise left here?"

"About an hour ago."

"What sort of a looking man?"

"A rough sort of fellow; he said his master had sent him with it, and that he would call for it when he came aboard!"

"What was his master's name?"

"He didn't say, but asked me for a check, and said the man would present it when he came for the valise."

"Why did he not have it put in the stateroom?"

"Oh, it's not safe to leave things in staterooms till after the steamer sails."

"When do you expect to go?"

"At daybreak."

"Your passengers will be aboard long before that time I suppose?"

"Yes; some of them are aboard now."

Bates then told the porter what he suspected was in the valise, and asked that he might be permitted to open it.

The porter refused to let him.

Then the clerk was called, and he also refused, saying that there was no certainty that Mr. Mason was going on this steamer; there were two others to sail at the same time, or soon after, and he might be going on either one of them.

"If I really thought the valise contained the stolen money I should not hesitate to let you have it and open it, but there seems to be too much doubt of it," said the clerk.

"If I find out conclusively that it is, will you let me open it?"

"Yes."

"And if he comes for it, you will not let him have it without notifying me?"

"No."

"Then I propose to find out definitely whether he intends to go on this steamer or not. I shall confine my attentions strictly to this, the police are watching the others."

"I will do everything in my power to assist you. Make yourself at home."

Meanwhile, Mr. Franklyn was not idle, and searched everywhere for Steve, leaving directions at the police station for them to telegraph to the railroad depot, which would be his headquarters, if anything was seen of the young man.

He then returned thither, and was surprised to find that Forbes had been on the track also, and had been more successful.

He saw that Steve's father was comfortable, and then, in company with Mr. Locke he started to go to the house on the bluff, whither Steve had gone.

He knew the locality, and never doubted his being able to find the house, or at least run upon Steve and Frank.

"We must lose no time," he said, "for that villain is as crafty as a fox, and rendered desperate by our close pursuit of him, may do we know not what."

Away hurried the two gentlemen in the direction of the bluffs, when suddenly a boy came running up behind them.

"Halloo!" he called, "ain't you Mr. Franklyn, the railroad president?"

"Yes, my boy, what is it?"

"Here's a note for you. A man give it to me and told me to hunt ye up."

The president took the note, tore it open, and read as follows:

"For fifty thousand dollars I will deliver up Mason and the girl, and tell where the stolen property is. If you really mean business be at the wharf of the Australian steamer at 3 A. M. I will know whether you intend to act in good faith or not, if you carry a handkerchief sticking out of your vasc. Unless you do, I shall have nothing to say to you, and shall permit Mason to go off, as in any case I shall lose nothing."

"That's most extraordinary," observed Mr. Franklyn. "Where's the boy?"

"Gone."

"What had we better do?"

"Go to the Australian steamer, and tell them to use extra precautions."

"He may not be going there."

"He must be, or this fellow would not have told us to meet him there."

"That's only a blind. Of course he would not endanger Mason's escape until he was sure he could get what he asked."

"He won't get a cent. I shall not compromise with thieves or the accomplices of thieves."

"You will not accept this fellow's proposition?"

"By no means."

"What shall you do now?"

"Go at once to the headquarters of the chief of police, and have an extra watch put upon all the steamers."

An hour afterwards the two gentlemen were again on their way to the house on the bluffs, when they suddenly observed a bright light in the heavens.

Then the fire bells began to ring, and as their iron throats clamored out a dreadful warning, the rumbling of the engines could be heard.

The gentlemen hurried on toward the bluff, where the fire seemed to be, and in a few moments reached the foot of a small street, whence they could see the flames, leaping up to the sky.

"I believe it is the very house we are seeking," said Mr. Locke.

"It must be, and without doubt that scoundrel, Mason, has fired it in order to complete his villainy. Oh, my poor child—my poor child!"

"Let us hasten; we may yet be in time."

Faster and faster they hurried on, and now the fire-engines began to rumble into the street, and pretty soon a stream of water was thrown upon the house.

The flames had burst from every window, and the screams of frightened women and children mingled with the hoarse shouts of the firemen, the clanging of bells, and the rumbling of wheels.

Suddenly a boy dashed from the lower door of the burning house, and ran down the street.

It was the messenger boy, Frank.

"Stop—stop!" said Mr. Franklyn, catching the boy by the arm.

"My darling—where is she?"

"They are both in the house."

The agonized man uttered a scream of terror, which was answered by a shout from the crowd.

At that moment two figures appeared on the roof of the burning building.

By the fierce light of the fire Mr. Franklyn instantly recognized them.

They were Engineer Steve and his own precious child, Ida Franklyn!

"A thousand dollars to the man who will save them!" he cries, in a voice which everyone can hear.

Then, with a wild cry of despair, as the flames shoot through the roof, he falls fainting into the arms of Mr. Locke.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE STEVE AND FRANK WENT, AND WHAT THEY FOUND.

Up the hill toward the bluffs went the two lads, fully determined to find Mason, and bring him to account.

They knew where the house was, or, at least, Frank did, the man Moss, being a dealer in costumes, and a reputed receiver of stolen goods, his reputation being none of the best.

They were about half way there when they saw a man and a boy ahead of them, and the former was giving the latter a note.

"Don't forget the note," said the man; and the boy answering that he wouldn't, came toward the young men, and passed them hurriedly.

In a moment more they reached the man, who was standing under a street lamp, and had not moved.

As Frank came up, the man suddenly seized him by the arm, and gazed intently into his face, showing great agitation.

"Your name is Frank Harris?" he asked, in intense excitement.

"No, it is not."

"But it is Frank? I know it is."

"How do you know it is?"

"Because I do; it is Harris also; don't you know me?"

"You are called Moss, I believe, though some call you Moses. I have never seen you, but have heard you described. You are getting yourself in a bad scrape."

"How so?" asked the man, somewhat startled.

"You have, secreted in your house, where we are now going," spoke up Steve, "the daughter of Mr. Franklyn, president of the Great Northwestern Railway."

"How do you know that?"

"Mason told us. We are going there now to help him to get the young lady aboard the steamer for China."

"He has really changed his mind about going to Australia, then?"

"Aha; here is a point gained," thought Steve to himself.

"Oh, yes," answered Frank, quickly taking in the situation. "That's too far off, and, besides, extradition is too easy. Once in China, there's no catching him. He daren't be seen taking the young lady aboard, so we are going to manage it for him. I am going to be dressed in the young lady's garments, and she will take mine and be smuggled aboard as a sick boy, and put into Mason's stateroom."

"And you?"

"Oh, he will stay behind in your house, and if Franklyn and the police break in, they will find him, and think they have foiled Mason," answered Steve, quickly. "That will give us a better chance to work."

"Capital—capital! The dodge is worthy of you; you are following in the steps of your father."

"My father?" said Frank, a light beginning to dawn upon him.

"Yes; I'm your father, so long separated from you. I was afraid you'd been brought up honest."

"Oho! my bringing up would astonish you," replied Frank. "What was the note you gave that boy?"

"Sh, let me whisper in your ear," and Moss took the boy to one side. "Is Mason paying you well for this job?"

"No; he ain't paying anything, scarcely," answered Frank, wondering what the man was coming at.

"If I paid you better, would you go back on him and work your old man's little racket for him?"

"You just bet I would."

"I think Mason is going back on us. Jack Morton took a valise of his to the China steamer. That was only a blind, for there's nothing in it, and he has all the money at my house."

"Well, what's the racket?"

"I have offered to compromise with old Franklyn, to give up Mason and the gal and the money for fifty thousand. I can make more by going back on him than I can for letting him get off. If you help me I'll give you something solid."

"But my chum, he'll want something."

"Is he reliable?"

"You bet! He'll do what I tell him. He hates Mason, though he seems to be working for him, and would do anything to get even with him."

"That's good. By Jove, Frank, Mose Harris is proud of you!"

"I'll astonish you some day, see if I don't," answered Frank, with a chuckle. "Give you a regular surprise party."

"That's right. Have you got a pop?"

"A pistol? No—I haven't."

"Here's one, then. I have a couple. I tell you what we'll do. Get the drop on Mason, capture the money and the gal, and if the old boy won't compromise, get away with the whole thing ourselves. Would you like to marry the gal?"

"No, but my chum is clean mashed on her. He'd do it at once, and I think she could easily be induced to have him."

"Not a bad idea; we'd make a cussed sight more that way than the other. By George, we'll do it."

"It's an immense go," said Frank, laughing; "shall I let my friend in?"

"Yes, do, by all means."

"Hi, Sam—Sam, come over here," hissed Frank; and Steve, who knew he must be meant, crossed over.

He knew that Frank was sharp enough for the villain, but he had nevertheless kept a good lookout in case the man attempted any injury to his friend.

Frank hastily told Steve of the plans he and Moss had made, and asked if he would leave Mason's service, and enter the other's.

"To be sure I will," answered Steve. "I hate Mason, and I wouldn't mind going back on him for a cent."

"You'll marry the gal too, won't you?" asked Moss.

"Is that necessary?"

"If you want to make more money it is. Mason's got a parson there, I sent out for him myself, and we'll take him."

"She might not have me," said Steve, who did not altogether like taking this advantage of the one he loved so well, even though it was to save her from her abductors.

"I'll fix that," said Frank. "We'll call you Steve Price; she's dead gone on him and would marry him in a minute, I know she would. That'll work bully, and she won't have a word of objection."

Steve was going to object, but Frank silenced him by a look.

He resolved to rescue Ida Franklyn at all hazards, but made up his mind that he would explain to her beforehand that he would not bind her to remain with him after they were once clear of the house.

Steve possessed a fine sense of honor, and he would no more have taken advantage of the young lady's desperate situation than he would have cut off his own hand.

He was not aware that Ida Franklyn loved him with as ardent a passion as his own, and even had he known this, he would have done nothing without her father's consent.

He decided to go ahead and trust to luck, feeling sure that with Frank's aid he would succeed in thwarting the scoundrel Mason in this particular at least, if not in all.

"We'll go up there now, and while I get Mason off on a false scent, do you, Frank, and your chum, go in to see the young lady, and I'll send in the parson and have the thing done up slick."

"That's the ticket."

"Then we'll lock Mason in and clear out. If old Moneybags means to compromise, he'll be on hand at three o'clock. It's now scarcely twelve, and we'll have time enough to make our preparations in case he goes back on us."

"Let's get along, then," said Frank.

"All right, we will."

The man started ahead followed by the two chums, Frank whispering in Steve's ear:

"I've got a revolver; do everything the fellow proposes. I know that Miss Franklyn will have no objection, and once we're out of the house you can give her up if you choose."

"All right, Frank," answered Steve, in the same tone, "trust me to do what's right. We'll cheat this fellow Mason, yet, see if we don't."

"I'm going for that valise of Mason's, mind that."

"All right, and I'll take care of Miss Franklyn. There'll be enough to look after Mason without us."

"So there will."

In a few moments the man stopped before an isolated house, and, turning to the young men, said in a whisper:

"Step into the hall and wait a moment while I get Mason out of the way."

"All right."

Moss let himself into the house, and closing the door, left the lads in the hall while he started to go up-stairs.

"Sh! Where is the valise with the stamps in it?" whispered Frank.

"In the little room over this."

The fellow then went up-stairs, while Steve awaited his return in great apprehension, fearing that some unexpected mischance might disclose their presence in the house to Mason or his satellite, Jack Morton.

Both he and Frank kept their hands upon their revolvers, determining to use them if anything happened, for full well they knew what they might expect should they again fall into the hands of Mason or his pals.

They both felt as if they had thrust their heads into the lion's mouth, and that only the utmost coolness and tact could save them.

Steve was still far from strong, and nothing but the excitement of his position kept him from giving out. He felt that much depended upon him, and was resolved to do his very best.

The man was absent nearly ten minutes, but at last he was seen coming down the stairs, and Steve's heart gave a leap.

"It's all right," whispered Moss. "He won't disturb us for some time yet."

"Where's the young woman?" whispered Steve, controlling his emotions with great difficulty.

"In the back room on this floor. You can go in, and I'll have the parson here in a minute. I've got him locked up in the closet for fear he'd run away."

"Locked up?" said Frank.

"Yes; if he makes any fuss, just you point your barker at him and make him go ahead."

"Rely on me for that."

The man led the way to a room in the rear of the house, and taking the key from his pocket, unlocked the door.

"Mason don't know I've got two keys to the room," he said with a grin. "He'll find me smarter than he thinks, I guess. I told him we'd pass him off as Steve Price, the name you gave me, you know, and he swore a horrible oath."

"Did he think it was a good racket?" asked Frank.

"Yes, first rate. Well, here you are; step right in and make it all right with the young woman, and I'll go for the parson. As soon as it's over, do you follow me; Frank and me'll nail the dollars."

"Suppose Mason objects?"

"Shoot him. You aren't afraid to do that, I guess."

"I should say not. Away with you, now, and fetch the parson."

The man departed, and Steve entered the room, followed by Frank.

It was tolerably well lighted, a large lamp standing upon a center table, and two smaller ones upon the shelf.

In one corner sat a young lady, evidently overcome with grief, who looked up as Steve entered.

It was indeed Ida Franklyn!

She recognized him in an instant, and arose to her feet with a glad cry.

"Engineer Steve!" she cried, joyfully. "Thank Heaven for this! You have come to save me!"

"Yes," answered Steve.

"I knew it—I knew it!" cried Ida, her eyes filling with glad tears.

Then, to Steve's intense astonishment, she rushed towards him, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him repeatedly upon both cheeks.

"You dear, good Steve!" she cried, rapturously. "I love you, and am not ashamed to say it."

A burst of light poured into Steve's mind with these words, and he realized that what he had never dared to hope was a blessed reality.

Ida Franklyn loved him!

With that knowledge firing his heart he felt that he could do anything.

Pressing the lovely girl to his breast, he said fiercely:

"Now let us see who will dare stand between me and mine! A whole world of Masons could not do it!"

CHAPTER XX.

ONE OF THE QUICKEST MARRIAGES ON RECORD—THE GREAT PERIL OF STEVE AND IDA!

"You have come to take me away—you and Frank?" asked the young lady, who was slightly acquainted with her father's messenger, having seen him occasionally.

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven! Let us go at once."

"Listen. We have no time to lose. I have had to resort to a dangerous expedient. There is a minister now in the house who has been brought here to marry you to Mason."

"He would not do so vile a thing—he could not!" said the young lady, passionately.

"He would be forced to do it. The man who owns this house is Frank's father, though the boy never knew it until this night. He means to outwit Mason. The minister will marry us, and then you are out of Mason's power; we will leave here at once, and do not fear but I shall restore you to your father. There will be means of outwitting this man Moses, never fear, but first of all, we must be married."

"Married!" echoed the young lady.

"Yes, there is no help for it. But let me assure you, Miss Franklyn, much as I love you, that if this thing is distasteful to you, I will release you the moment you are safe, and never trouble you. It must be done, or we can never escape. The assistance of Moss is absolutely necessary, and without this ceremony we cannot hope for it. Believe me, I would not resort to so extreme a measure if there were any other way."

"And you pledge me your word that you will release me the moment I am safe with my father?"

"If you ask me, yes. I pledge you my word of honor, I swear it."

"I will not ask it," she said fondly, and throwing her arms again around the young engineer, she kissed him most affectionately.

"Dare I hope for such happiness?" said Steve, his breath nearly leaving him, while his pulse throbbed wildly.

"Yes, Stephen Price, I have long loved you, and knew that you returned my love. I have waited for this moment many long days. You need not ask me to be released, for I am content to be yours forever."

"But your father? He may object."

"He cannot; have you not saved me from that villain's hands?"

"He told me to ask him for anything, and I should have it. I never dared hope that he would give me the one thing that I prized above all others—yourself."

"I give you myself now, dear Steve, and I know that he will approve of the gift. Ah, someone comes."

"It is Moss with the poor parson," said Frank, who had discreetly turned his head during the scene just described. "Make believe you don't like it."

At that moment Moss and the minister entered, and Steve covered his face with his hat.

"Is it all right?" whispered the rogue to Frank.

"Yes, she thinks it's Steve Price she's going to marry, and is crazy with delight."

"Good enough! We must hurry, for Mason is getting uneasy. I've locked him in, but I'm mightily afraid he'll bust out."

"Go ahead with the music, then," answered Frank.

"Mr. Johnstone," said Moss, "you must marry these young people, and marry 'em tight. Their parents have no objection, but there's a fellow up-stairs who has, and he may want to interfere. Hurry up, and don't use any extra words."

Steve and Ida advanced into the center of the room and stood before the frightened parson.

"What is your name, young gentleman?" the latter asked, casting a scared look at the butt of the lad's revolver, which was sticking out of his belt.

"Stephen Price, engineer on the Great Northwestern Railway."

"What is your name, my young lady?"

"Ida Franklyn."

"Do you, Stephen Price, engineer on the Great Northwestern Railway, take this young lady, Miss Ida Franklyn, occupation unknown, to be your true and lawfully wedded wife?"

"I do," said Steve firmly, the hot blood rushing to his cheeks.

"And do you, Ida Franklyn, occupation unknown, take the afore-said Stephen Price, engineer on the Great Northwestern Railway, to be your true and lawfully wedded husband?"

"I do," answered Ida, with equal firmness, looking more beautiful than ever before in her life.

"Hurry up!" said Moss, who heard Mason pounding on the door of the room above.

"Then I do here pronounce you husband and wife, and what God has joined together, let no man put asunder," continued the minister, as the young couple joined hands and knelt before him.

"Hurry up with the blessing!" shouted Moss; "that fellow's getting out!"

The benediction was pronounced in great haste, and with as much reverence as was possible under the circumstances, and Steve kissed his young bride and folded her to his bosom.

"Make out the certificate as quick as you know how!" yelled Frank, and the now thoroughly alarmed clergyman filled out a blank which Moss and Frank signed as witnesses.

Frank seized the paper, and glancing over it to see if it was all correct, handed it to Ida, who thrust it into her bosom.

At that very instant the door was thrown open and Mason entered, his face livid with rage, and a loaded revolver in his hand.

"What does this mean?" he cried, seeing the group before him.

"It means that you are foiled, Robert Stevenson!" cried Steve, pushing his cap from his forehead. "And this young lady is my wife!"

"Engineer Steve! Thunder and blazes! Have you permitted this, Mose Harris?"

"Engineer Steve!" echoed Moss. "Is this young fellow Engineer Steve?"

"Yes."

"Thunder!"

"You've made a pretty mess of it, haven't you?" roared Mason, with a volley of oaths. "Upon him! He must not leave this place alive!"

Mason rushed upon Steve, but the latter, throwing the young lady behind him, drew his revolver and awaited the attack.

Frank sprang to his side, revolver in hand, while Moss hardly knew which side to espouse, Steve's or Mason's.

The clergyman shoved his Bible into his pocket and made a dash for the door, falling over several chairs and making a tremendous noise.

Mason stood irresolute before the pair of brave lads, and this decided Moss upon the instant.

"Did you know this was Engineer Steve, Frank?" he asked.

"You can take your oath on that, governor."

"Then I join hands with the strongest side," said the fellow, whipping out his revolver and standing alongside of Frank and Steve.

During the whole of this exciting scene Ida never flinched nor screamed, but, with one hand in Steve's, stood, partly shielded by him, awaiting developments.

"You cowardly cur!" roared the baffled villain; "you go back on me, do you? Take that, then!"

With a sudden rush forward, he fired point blank at the head of his former pal three shots in rapid succession.

Uttering a piercing shriek, the man threw up his hands and fell against the table upon which stood the large lamp.

Upon the instant Steve fired a shot at Mason's legs, and brought him to the floor, uttering a blasphemous shout, while the revolver fell from his grasp.

The next instant there was an explosion, and the room was filled with smoke and flame.

Moss had overturned the large lamp upon the floor, and it had burst, setting fire to the carpet.

Some of the flying fragments had struck one of the smaller lamps, and it, too, had exploded, the burning oil barely escaping Steve.

"We must run for it, Steve!" shouted Frank. "Do you make for the street, and I'll secure the money!"

He darted out at the door and rushed up-stairs, meeting Jack Morton coming down.

Driving his head with full force into the fireman's stomach, the plucky lad doubled him up, and sent him flying over his head down the stairs, landing him at the bottom all in a heap.

He darted on up the stairs, and reaching the hall, made for the little room over the door.

It was locked, but he quickly forced an entrance, blowing the lock all to pieces with one shot from his revolver.

There was light enough in the room to enable him to see the little valise sitting on the bureau, and in an instant it was in his possession.

When he reached the head of the stairs, the hallway below was full of flame and smoke, and at that instant the deep tones of the alarm bell rang out upon the air.

Pulling his cap down over his eyes and stuffing his handkerchief in his mouth, Frank flew down those stairs like the wind.

His hair was singed and his clothes scorched, but he kept a tight hold upon the little valise, and jumped rather than ran down the stairs.

Jack Morton had disappeared, and nothing was to be seen of either Mason, Steve or the young lady.

Frank shouted Steve's name several times, but there was no answer.

He shouted again, but the only reply was the roar of the flames, which burst upon him from the burning room and shivered all the glass at the side of the door.

"He must have got out already," thought Frank, and swinging open the front door, he dashed down the steps as the alarm rang out more wildly than ever, and people began to collect in crowds.

Paying no attention to any one, Frank ran down the street in the direction of the railroad station, and had not gone far when he came plump against Mr. Franklyn and Mr. Locke.

He hurriedly explained the situation, asking them if they had seen Steve.

When they said they had not, he gasped, and caught for support at an iron railing.

"Then they are in the house yet!" he said, and the three hurried along toward it, the light being now very brilliant.

In the meantime what had Steve and the young lady been doing toward making their escape from the burning dwelling?

The room seemed to catch on fire all in an instant, and the third lamp soon exploded from the great heat.

The doors leading to the front room were burst open by the force of the flames, and that was soon in a blaze as well as the other.

Catching Ida up in his arms, Steve made a rush for the door just as Mason arose to his feet, one leg bleeding and causing him great pain. He was on the point of firing at Steve, having picked up his weapon, when the young man struck it from his grasp, and throwing him to one side, ran out at the door, and thence toward the front of the house.

Another obstacle awaited them here in the form of Jack Morton, who at that moment had scrambled to his feet and stood opposing the fugitives.

"Stand aside!" cried Steve, "or I'll blow your brains out!"

As he spoke the flames broke out from the door of the front room, and effectually barred their further progress.

Jack, desiring to save his own life as much as Steve did, made a dash past the young engineer and hurried down the back stairs, slamming and locking the door at the foot.

Mason was just coming out of the room, and Steve, seeing a flight of back stairs leading to the floor above, hastened up to them, supporting his beloved with one arm.

There seemed to be no fire in that part of the house as yet, and Steve reached the upper floor just as Frank was hastening down, although he knew it not.

The halls filled rapidly with smoke, and the fire soon broke through the ceiling of the room where it had originated, and in a moment the one above was in flames, when Steve opened the door.

He heard Frank call him, but, stifled by the smoke, was unable for a few moments to utter a sound.

"To the roof!" he said; "it is now our only hope. I had no idea the flames would spread so rapidly."

He heard Mason shouting and cursing in the hall below, and then the man seemed to be trying to get up-stairs.

"The money—the money!" he shouted. "I mustn't lose that, too! With that I can live in ease, even if I do lose the girl!"

The ladder leading to the roof was close where Steve stood, and in a moment he was at the top and had his hand to the scuttle.

It was fastened down with a padlock.

Was there to be no escape for the brave youth?

Surrounded by flames, a desperate man close behind, and his way blocked by a closed scuttle, his position was indeed a desperate one.

Passing one arm around the young lady, he seized the padlock with both hands, and with a strength born of desperation, wrenched it from the staple and threw aside the covering.

The rush of air which entered forced the flames back, and Mason, just in sight at the top of the stairs, uttered a howl of rage, and fired a shot at Steve as he disappeared through the opening in the roof.

Then the discomfited villain flew along the burning hall, and entered the little room where the valise containing the money had been, and where he still expected to find it.

He saw at once that it was gone, and his rage knew no bounds.

Baffled at every point, cheated of his revenge, robbed of the young lady he had abducted, deprived of the money he had stolen, badly wounded, and shut up in a burning house, it was enough to drive him crazy.

"Curse the luck!" he hissed, as he threw open the window and let in the air, which drove the flames away from him. "Am I to be cheated out of everything after I have made so desperate a struggle? At all events, I shall not be taken, and my miserable brother shall perish in the flames."

The bed which the room contained was of the old-fashioned, corded kind, and in a moment the man had thrown off the clothes, and had untied enough of the cord to let himself down to the lower story, the house being only two stories high above the basement.

There was a great crowd collected outside, and he suddenly heard a terrible cry from someone in the street.

"A thousand dollars to the man who will save my child!" was the cry that rang out upon the night.

"Aha, Mr. Millionaire Franklyn!" muttered Mason, as he retreated before the fierce flames, which had already set fire to his clothing, and throwing out his rope, made fast to the bed, prepared to descend, "you won't have the smallest satisfaction of seeing your daughter married to me, even!"

As he slid down the slender cord the crowd below noticed him

and cheered him, thinking he was going to the assistance of the poor unfortunates upon the roof.

A cry from Mr. Locke at once undeceived them.

"Do not let that man escape!" he shouted. "He is the villain who has caused all this trouble! He is Mason, the defaulter! Seize him!"

At that moment a cry of horror went up from every person in the crowd, and with one accord they rushed to the back of the house, where there was the least danger.

The whole front of the roof had fallen in, leaving Steve and Ida upon a narrow portion at the back, the flames raging all around them, and the ladder by which they had ascended burned away.

Mason reached the stoop as the roof fell in, and brandishing his revolver, which still held one cartridge, he bounded down the steps, his hurt leg painning him terribly, and was away before any one could stop him.

Fortunately for him, the front walls of the house had not fallen in, and did not do so until he was safe, and as nearly everyone was at the rear of the house by this time, no one stopped him.

One fireman, directing a stream of water upon the house, tried to do so, but he turned his weapon upon the man, and the latter retreated.

As Mason fled the fireman threw the stream of water upon him and knocked him down, at the same time extinguishing the fire upon his clothes.

Drenched with water, the balked rogue scrambled to his feet and ran off, a curse upon his lips and murder in his heart.

"To the steamer!" he hissed; "that is my only hope."

Frank Haydon has not been idle by any means, all this time doing his utmost to save Steve; but in a sudden lull, when it seemed as though there might still be some hope, the flames being somewhat subdued, he thinks of the little valise in his possession.

"By Jove, it will be as well to make sure that I've got the money," he says to himself, and thereupon opens the bag with a wrench of his strong hands.

There are clothes on top, but underneath them is the money, doubtless, he thinks, as he hastily throws them aside.

A hurried but thorough search convinces him that not a dollar of the money is in the valise.

"Confound it!" he says; "that blasted fool, Jack Morton, has taken the wrong valise to the steamer!"

"I must save that by all means!" he cries, hurriedly.

"Thank God," he murmurs, looking up at the house, "they are beyond danger now, and I'm off to the China mail steamer to recover that money before the villain, Mason, gets it!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MONEY IS RECOVERED--FRANK'S REQUEST.

MR. DETECTIVE BATES sat on the deck of the China mail steamer awaiting the arrival of the mysterious person who was expected to call for the little black valise, when he was attracted by the sound of fire bells.

For a while he did not pay much attention to them, but sat calmly smoking his cigar, and wondering whether Mason would really be foolish enough to come in person for the money, when presently his attention was attracted by a redness in the sky.

He had been gazing out upon the harbor, but now he looked in the direction of the bluff, and saw the flames rising from the burning house, where Steve and Frank had already passed through so many exciting scenes.

He could see the flames and the flying sparks, and even hear the shouts of the firemen and the puffing of the engines.

He became greatly interested in the scene, and going to the extreme after end of the steamer, stood watching it, wondering whose house it was, and what had set it afire; whether this was more of Mason's work or not, and if Steve would catch the villain, and thus prevent his coming after the money.

He could see the roof when it fell in, and heard a great shout, and then he saw the streams of water playing more vigorously upon the flames, and after that again heard an awful crash, saw a great mass of smoke and flames rush up, and then heard a shout louder and longer than the rest, after which the fire seemed to have been extinguished.

He was turning to go forward, when the porter came running toward him in great haste.

"Someone has come for the valise, sir," said the man, excitedly, "and I told him to wait a moment. He appeared very much excited, and could scarcely speak when he asked me for it, but just pointed it out and said he had called for it."

"Was it Mason?" asked Bates, becoming excited in his turn.

"I don't know, sir. He was very much excited from running, and said he guessed he had beaten the other fellow, anyhow."

"The other fellow? Then it must be Mason, and they are in pursuit of him. By Jove, we'll have him! Hurry up! We'll nab him sure this time!"

The two men hurried forward, but just at the moment they reached the gangway leading down to the cabin a figure was seen rushing across the plank toward the wharf.

This figure had a small black valise in its hand, and seemed to be in great haste.

"There he is now!" shouted the porter, "and I bet he's got that very identical bag!"

"Hallo here! Stop!" cried Bates, darting after the retreating figure, which seemed to be a young man or boy. "Stop, or I'll fire!"

"Fire and be blowed!" said the person, as he sprang upon the dock and darted off toward the town.

Bates put after him full tilt, and did fire as he had threatened.

The thief ran plump against a man coming swiftly down the wharf, and fell to the ground, uttering a shriek of pain.

Bates sprang after him, and passed the man who had been run into, and who held his head down.

"Stop him—stop that fellow!" cried the young man that Bates had hit. "Stop the villain!"

Bates came up to the young fellow at this moment, and seized him before he could rise.

"Move a peg and you're a dead man!" he cried, furiously. "I've got you now, Mr. Mason—you and the money both!"

"You old fool, you hit the wrong fellow, and let Mason escape! It was mighty lucky he didn't see I had the bag when I knocked against him!"

"Heaven and earth!" cried Bates, in blank amazement; "it's Frank Haydon, Mr. Franklyn's messenger."

"Yes, it is, you donkey, and a nice crack you've given me in the shoulder, too! You've let that villain escape, and I hallooed to you to stop him. Couldn't you tell my voice when you heard it?"

"I thought it sounded familiar, but I wasn't going to let that bag of money go if I could help it."

"You've let him go, though, and that's worse! If you hadn't hit me I'd have turned on him and have had a good fight of it; but what with having all my wind knocked out, and you plugging me with your old bullets, I was all broken up."

"You've got the money?"

"Yes, I have; I made sure of that when I collared the valise. The porter told me to wait a moment and he would give it to me. I was afraid Mason had got here first, though I took all the short cuts. I lived here so long that I know every one there is, and, of course, I wasn't going to wait till Mason came; so when the porter left I just froze onto that valise, for I knew it in a moment, and yanking it open to see if it had the money in it all right, took to my heels. When you first yelled I thought it was Mason, but at the second shout I knew it was you, and was going to stop when I ran against the very villain himself, and now he's slipped away, recognizing both of us, and that part of our job's got to be done all over again."

"I'm sorry for that, but at all events, we've got the money and bonds."

"You haven't got 'em, and won't get 'em either, so you needn't say 'we' so fine. It's I that has them, Mr. Francisco Haydon, late messenger boy to the president of the Great Northwestern Railway, and I intend to hang onto them until I see him."

"I don't know as I ought to let you have such a large amount in your possession; you might get robbed."

"I'd just like to see you help yourself. I'm the president's special messenger. You don't deny that, I suppose? Well, this is a particularly special message, and I'd like to see you or any one else meddle with me! I've got a pepper-box, and know how to use it, so don't bother me!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Make tracks for the depot and deposit this stuff in the car. I can't attend to more than one thing at a time, so you'd better look after Mr. Bob Mason, and see if you can't catch him before he gets away to China."

So saying, Frank ran off, though his shoulder pained him badly and he already began to feel weak from the loss of blood.

Bates felt very much chagrined at not having secured the money as he had fully made up his mind to get it, and to be outstripped by a youngster like Frank was altogether too much for him to stand.

He went back to the steamer in order to give orders to the Rockwell's Bluffs police to keep a sharp lookout for Mason, and not to let any one resembling him come aboard.

He was disgusted to find that Mason had already gone aboard, and finding his valise taken, had sworn a great oath to be revenged upon the young villain that had taken it.

Then he had disappeared, but in what direction no one could tell. He had not been arrested because the porter thought that Bates was already in pursuit of him, and the detective felt more ashamed of himself than ever to find that his blunder had caused others to blunder in turn, and that to him was owing the escape of the villain.

He determined to scour the town in search of the villain, for although the securities had been recovered, it was important that the thief should be captured also, and brought to punishment.

He presently had an opportunity to heal his wounded feelings by doing something useful, and how it happened we will now proceed to state.

Frank was hurrying along as fast as he was able, the little strap of the valise strung across his shoulder, and one hand holding his treasure, when by the light of a street lamp he saw someone approaching in a hurry.

He seized his revolver, but suddenly felt so faint from loss of blood that he could hardly stand, being obliged to lean against the lamp post for support.

The advancing figure approached, and by the light Frank recognized Jack Morton, the fireman, whom he had so unceremoniously thrown down-stairs not an hour before.

"Aha, it's you, is it?" said Jack. "Give me that valise this minute or I'll cut your throat. I'm bound to make something out of this job before I leave the town."

"Stand back," said Frank, leveling his weapon. "This thing has cost me too much trouble to give up easily. Stand back, I say, or I'll put a bullet in you."

Jack could see that Frank was pale and worn out, and with one swift movement, he sprang upon the boy, threw him to the ground, and tried to seize the valise.

Frank fired, but his hand being unsteady, his aim was poor, and the bullet merely grazed the top of the ruffian's hat.

Frank hung on to the bag with the utmost desperation, and prevented Jack from opening it, for one handful of the money it contained would have sufficed him, provided he could not get the whole.

The villain, failing in his efforts to secure any portion of the money, flew at Frank's throat, one knee pressed upon the lad's chest, while one hand groped for the revolver which had fallen a foot or so away.

It was going hard with the poor fellow, when he bethought himself to call for assistance, hoping that Bates would be near.

Just as Jack's fingers closed upon his throat, he managed to give utterance to one cry for help, and then he was pressed flat to the ground, his brain reeling, and his tongue beginning to protrude from his mouth.

One hand was thrown out, and struck something cold and hard and cylindrical in shape, which the lad divined at once was his revolver.

He had just strength enough to grasp, but not to raise it, and with an effort he succeeded in firing two shots, when his failing resources gave out, and he lost entire consciousness.

It happened that Bates was not far off at the time, and hearing the cry for help and the three pistol shots, ran to the spot to find out what it all meant.

He was just in time to see Jack Morton cut the strap that held the little black hand-bag, and rising to his feet, make off with it under his arm.

Bates took in the situation at a glance.

Frank had been attacked, notwithstanding his assurances of being

able to take care of himself; and now the money, for which both had struggled, was in danger of being lost again.

Quick as a flash the man whipped out his revolver and fired, taking Jack in the sole of the foot and bringing him to the ground.

Before he could get up, Bates fired a second shot, which, although whizzed over his head, gave him to understand that it would be an exceedingly dangerous thing for him to escape.

He knew by the sound of his pursuer's footsteps that it was not Frank, and he called out in piteous tones for the man not to kill him.

Bates then came up, and, clapping a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists, deprived him of the valise, and commanded him to arise.

"Don't kill me!" he said. "I didn't mean to hurt him."

"That's a lie, and you know it!" answered Bates, sternly. "You know you meant to kill him, if necessary, you cowardly cur! Where's your master—the villain, Mason?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him, and don't want to. I've had enough of him."

"You're good for fifteen years in State prison, so bear that in mind. March along back there, now, or I'll send a bullet through the top of your head!"

Two or three policemen, attracted by the repeated reports of pistol shots, now arrived, and Bates, giving Jack into their charge, with instructions to take him to the station and lock him up until the morning, went back to where Frank was just beginning to come to his senses, and lifted him to his feet.

"Is it you, Mr. Bates," said the lad. "You've got the money, have you? I'm sorry now that I called you an old fool, but I was annoyed. I'm much obliged to you for your help, for I was so weak that I couldn't do a thing."

"Never mind, my lad; it was all my fault in the beginning. Here, rest on my arm, and I will take you where your hurt can be looked after."

Frank was taken to the depot, and the same physician who had attended to Steve's poor father, was called in and attended to his wound—not a fatal one necessarily, by the way, though the loss of blood, if the flow had not been stanching, might have ultimately caused the lad's death.

He was given all the necessary care, and then, after the administering of proper stimulants, dropped off into a quiet sleep, saying, as he closed his eyes:

"This night's work has done a good deal toward the establishment of a first-class hospital for railroad men. Three of 'em have been laid up, so far, and nobody knows how many more there will be before daylight, for it's morning already."

Frank awoke about three hours later with a rousing appetite, and called for something to eat; and as the refreshment counter man was just beginning to get ready for the business of the day, the lad was soon supplied with a small beefsteak, nicely cooked, and a steaming cup of coffee.

While he was disposing of his meal, Frank was delighted to see Mr. Franklyn enter the room, the lad being in one of the small offices.

"Is Steve all right, sir?" asked Frank.

"He is, I am happy to state."

"Hurrah for that!" shouted Frank, nearly upsetting his plate.

"I have heard of your noble deeds to-night, my lad," continued the gentleman, "and it is to you that the Great Northwestern Railway Company owes the safety of its property. Ask any favor of me and it shall be granted."

"Then make me conductor of Engineer Steve's train, for I'd like nothing better than to travel up and down the road with him, and share some of his glory."

CHAPTER XXII.

A SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENT—MASON STILL AT WORK.

FOR a few moments it seemed to Steve as if there was to be no escape, and that both he and Miss Franklyn had only got clear of Mason to be devoured by flames.

Fortunately, the rear part of the house was not nearly so high from the ground as the front, a bank rising to the height of the first story windows.

The house had been built against a bank, which had been dug away to make a cellar, and left the solid earth standing against it.

Owing to this circumstance, which the fireman soon discovered, it was a simple task to raise a ladder to the roof, and while the men

kept back the flames with the streams of water, Steve descended with Miss Franklyn in his arms, and in another moment she was clasped to her father's bosom.

Suddenly there was a shout, and the whole crowd rushed pell mell from the place, as the remainder of the roof and the rear walls fell in with a crash, sending the sparks flying upwards to a great height.

Steve was received with a round of hearty cheers, and lifted upon the shoulders of two sturdy firemen, was carried down in triumph, while shout after shout rose upon the air.

At last Steve begged to be released, and in company with Mr. Franklyn, Mr. Locke and Miss Ida herself, of course, went to the offices of the company.

"Steve," said the president, when they were all seated, "you have done me the greatest possible service; you have saved my child. You remember that I told you I would give you whatever you asked if you were successful!"

"Yes, sir, and I said I was afraid not."

"So you did; but I do not believe you would ask for anything unreasonable."

"I hope not, sir; but there is only one thing that can repay me for my services in your daughter's behalf."

"What is that, Steve?"

"Her hand in marriage."

"What? Marry my daughter!" said Mr. Franklyn, in the utmost astonishment, never having imagined such a thing.

"I was afraid you would think my demand unreasonable," answered Steve, while Ida was blushing like a rose.

"Well, I don't know as it is so very unreasonable," answered the millionaire, with a laugh; "but perhaps it would be just as well to ask my daughter's opinion upon the matter."

Ida began to smile, and then broke into a silvery laugh, while poor Steve looked confused.

"He has already asked it," said the young lady; "and he tells me that he has long worshiped me in secret. That's just exactly what he said."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him that it was the most reasonable thing in the world to ask for my hand after saving me from so many dangers, and besides that, although he did not know it before I told him, I have long loved him, and would have died single rather than live without him."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered the president, smiling, "and to learn also that this is no sudden passion newly sprung up, but one that has mutually existed in your hearts for some time, although unknown to each other. I shall be proud to call you my son, Steve, as I have had many opportunities to notice your sterling qualities. You will be satisfied to wait until you are of age, I presume!"

Steve blushed, and looked perplexed.

How should he tell of the expedient that they had been forced into that night?

Should he declare his marriage or keep it secret till the two years had elapsed?

He hardly wanted to do that, as he did not think it would be doing fairly by Mr. Franklyn to conceal from him the fact that his daughter had already been married to him under circumstances that, at the time, had seemed to render it absolutely necessary.

At last, after a brief mental struggle, he determined to reveal it.

"I owe you a word of explanation, Mr. Franklyn," he said, at length. "Your daughter and I are already——"

"Wait a minute, Steve—wait a minute!" cried Ida, excitedly, feeling in the bosom of her dress for the certificate which Frank had given her. "Oh, dear, I've lost it!" she said. "It must have fallen into the fire!"

"What has fallen into the fire?" asked her father. "Your locket?"

"No, but the certificate."

"Certificate! What certificate?"

"The marriage certificate."

"What would you be doing with a marriage certificate?" asked the president, laughing, but very much mystified. "Did you bring along a blank one to have filled out?"

"It's been already filled out," said Steve. "We were married to-night."

"Married?"

"Yes, sir," and then Steve told him the whole story.

"Well, that is romantic, indeed. I don't blame you, Steve, under the circumstances," answered Mr. Franklyn; "but as Ida seems to have lost the document, suppose we wait awhile and have another wedding in a little less of a hurry, and officiated at by a clergyman who is not frightened out of his wits. You won't mind waiting, will you?"

"No, sir, for I always meant to ask your permission, and I told Ida that I would relinquish all claims to her hand the moment she was safe, if she desired so—didn't I, dear?"

"So he did, pa; but I wouldn't have it, would I, Steve?"

Mr. Franklyn laughed, and taking the hand of his children, for so he considered them both, into his own, said, kindly:

"Ida, my child, I am glad you have chosen so wisely, and have not let the dust of wealth blind your eyes to real worth. Stephen, I am more than pleased to be able to repay you as you wish, for all that you have done for us. My child shall be yours when you come of age. I know you will not claim her before that time, and I shall take care that she brings you no mean marriage portion."

The young lovers thanked the kind-hearted gentleman, agreeing to accede to all his wishes; and then, after a fond embrace, Steve released his sweetheart, and said:

"Our work is not yet finished, Mr. Franklyn. The money is not yet recovered, and until that scoundrelly brother of mine is captured, and the money brought back, I shall not feel as if I had completed my bargain."

So saying, Steve left the place, not knowing exactly where to go, and wishing that he might find Frank Haydon.

He had barely left the office when word was brought to Mr. Franklyn that the money was safe and one of the villains in prison, and that Bates, the detective, wanted to see him at the depot.

In company with Mr. Locke, he proceeded at once to the spot, and learned the whole story of Frank's brave conduct from the detective, who gave the lad his whole share of praise for what he had done.

The lad was asleep in one of the little offices, therefore, Mr. Franklyn concluded to wait until he awoke, before he expressed his gratitude.

The money and securities were found to be all right, with the exception of two or three hundred dollars which Mason had put into his pocket, and part of which he had given to Jack Morton in payment for his services.

Mr. Franklyn visited the police-station, and made out a formal complaint against Jack, claiming the money found upon him as part of the property of the railroad.

Jack admitted that Mason had taken part of the contents of the valise to pay him with, keeping considerable in his own pocket, and the money was at once confiscated, and Mr. Jack remanded for his trial in the morning.

He promised to go back to Springfield without a requisition, Rockwell's Bluffs being in a different State, and said that all he would be sorry for, was Mason's getting away.

Bates assured him that the villain would not be so fortunate, and then the three gentlemen returned to the depot, where soon afterwards Frank awoke and partook of his breakfast, as has been already stated.

Much had been done in the short time since Steve had run his engine into the yard, and nearly all the plans of the villains had been frustrated.

Jack was captured, Moses lay burned to ashes in the ruins of the house on the bluffs, Ida had been restored to her rejoicing father, the money was safe, and with it the financial condition of the railroad; and now all that remained was to capture the chief plotter, to repair the damages along the road caused during this wild chase, and then our friends would return home satisfied.

What had become of the rough woman, Mason's coadjutor, whose heart had been touched and whose sympathies had been awakened by the memories of the years long gone by, and who had revealed to Frank Haydon the secret of his parentage, a secret which would never again be revealed to any one—where was she?

After the boys had left, she had succeeded without much difficulty in freeing herself, but she waited for some time before she ventured forth, not caring to see Mason just then.

It had been originally intended that she should accompany upon the steamer, in the capacity of a lady's maid, Mason knowing that she would take particular pains to see that the young man made no friends, and told no pitiful stories to the passengers.

The affair had been plotted long before it was carried out, Moses had engaged the woman, and she had been waiting Mason coming for two or three days in the old store-chamber where Steve had been confined.

Moses pretended to secure a passage for Mason upon the steamer for Australia, although the man expected to go to China, a passage for which had been got for him under another name.

Miss Franklyn was to be kept in the tunnel until just before the steamer sailed; but owing to the fact of Steve's following so close behind, the plan was changed.

When the plotters arrived, the young lady was sent to Moses' house, while the woman remained behind to keep an eye on Steve; and this is how she had happened to be in the tunnel, Mason having determined to capture the young engineer, if no one else.

The yard was deserted when he arrived, although he knew enough not to run his engine into it, but left it on a siding just before entering the tunnel, after having switched the freight car upon the main line.

When at last Steve was seen approaching, he and Jack hid in the darkness, knowing that Steve would most likely jump from the engine when he saw his danger.

As has been seen, this is exactly what he did do, thus materially aiding the villains to carry out their plot against him.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, just the hour appointed by the treacherous Moss for the payment of the compromise money supposing his offer had been accepted, when a woman, coarsely clad and wearing an old shawl over her shoulders, was walking along the wharves gazing intently at the water and evidently watching for something.

Suddenly she paused, and dodged behind the corner of a warehouse as she heard footsteps and saw a man walking hurriedly down the wharf, just having emerged from a narrow street.

The night was dark and cheerless, there being no moon, and the heavy clouds hanging low over the harbor and town, and the place not such as many persons would care to frequent at that hour; so she was pretty sure that she knew the man who was coming.

Suddenly she sprang out and seized him by the arm, looking hurriedly into his face, half shaded by a slouched hat.

"Ha-ha, Bob Mason, you've been doing well to-night," she laughed. "Foiled at every turn. All your plans destroyed. Do you think you'd better try the steamer, or don't you want to go to China alone?"

"Confound you," swore Mason; "I believe you are at the bottom of all my troubles, and I intend to murder you; so say your prayers quick, before I throw you into the harbor to be food for the sharks which infest it!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TERRIBLE REVENGE AND A JUST PUNISHMENT.

At these words Mason sprang at the woman, and seizing both her wrists in one of his hands, put the other over her mouth to prevent her crying out, and dragged her rapidly toward the edge of the wharf.

The poor woman struggled vainly to resist, or to attract attention if happily any one might be passing that unfrequented locality at such an unseemly hour.

She was a strong woman, but in the hands of the desperate villain she was but as a child.

His intention was only too evident, and her soul sank within her as the wretch dragged her nearer and nearer to the edge of the wharf.

The harbor was known to be infested with rapacious sharks attracted thither by the refuse thrown into the water daily from the markets, and the many steamers and sailing vessels which lay there.

Not far away, the hands employed upon the outgoing steamer were busily engaged in getting aboard the last of the freight, and the baggage of the passengers.

An outcry might possibly be heard by them; but struggle as she would, the poor creature was unable to utter a sound.

The dark waters rushed and surged about the end of the pier, lit by the light of the moon, just struggling from the dense clouds

the morning breeze had begun to break up, could be seen the sharp fins of several of those voracious monsters that rendered the harbor so dangerous.

The end of the pier was now not ten feet away, and the poor woman's fate was certain.

A plunge into those dark waters would be the signal for the advance of the sharks, whose greedy jaws would close upon their victim ere she could rise to the surface and call for help.

It was a horrible fate, and he was a fiend indeed who would thus doom a fellow creature.

Had he no pity—no kindly feelings?

No; for steeped in crime, utterly hardened to remorse, deaf to the cries of conscience as he was, the villain's only thought was of revenge.

"You have played me false!" he cried; "and even now you would betray me. You shall see how I punish all traitors. The river shall be your grave, your body food for the sharks."

She makes one last effort to free herself, struggling with the very agony and desperation of despair.

She succeeds at the last moment in breaking away from him, and utters one piercing scream for help.

Too late!

He rushes upon her like a wild beast, and with one powerful push hurls her from the dock.

Again she screams for help, the cry arousing the echoes far and near.

Then she strikes the water, but ere she sinks, utters a third most wild and agonizing shriek.

Then the dark waters close over her and stifle her cries, while the villain stands watching for her to arise.

The sharks have heard the plunge, and are on the alert in an instant.

Their savage instinct tells them that a victim is near, and with a horrid rush they glide to the spot where the poor woman has just come to the surface.

A cry is upon her lips, a fierce desire for escape in her heart.

Both are stifled in a moment.

The sharks turn upon their backs, and their terrible jaws close upon the body of their victim as they fight for the largest share of the prize.

The blood-stained water is churned into foam by their struggles, the moon revealing the whole terrible scene to the villain upon the pier.

"Ha-ha! thus perish all my foes," laughed he. "Nothing is too bad for those who play Bob Mason false!"

Then there comes a shout from the water, and a boat is seen approaching.

A pistol shot is heard, and then an answering shout.

"The villain is here!" cries the occupant of the boat. "Do not permit him to escape!"

The person in the boat is Engineer Steve.

The men on the bank, whose hurrying footsteps are now heard, are Mr. Franklyn and Mr. Locke.

Another boat approaches, and a man jumps out the instant Steve has done so.

This is Forbes, the engineer.

"There he goes!" he shouts. "He is making for the warehouse!"

"Head him off!" cries Steve to two other men, who at that instant made their appearance.

These are Bates and one of the brakemen of the special train.

The pursuers of the guilty wretch seem to have all met at one and the same time, as if by appointment.

It is the result of accident merely, but there is fatality in the accident which places it beyond the realm of chance.

It is the hand of fate which has brought them all together at this moment.

It is not chance; it is fatality.

The villain is doomed; his hour of punishment, recorded in that dreadful book of fate, is at hand. Nothing can save him.

He rushes toward the warehouse, standing solitary and alone, apart from all other buildings, midway upon the wharf.

His hope is that he may escape by hiding in it.

Vain hope.

Did he but know it, that act but helps to hasten the hour of his doom.

Who can fight against fate?

The very steps taken to prevent the accomplishment of the thing recorded beforehand, often tend to aid the avenging powers.

So it is now.

Almost anything else would have aided the villain, but the attempt to escape by way of the warehouse will prove his destruction.

The building, standing alone as it does, free from contact with all others, was placed there for a purpose.

In it had formerly been stored large quantities of dynamite, nitro-glycerine and other powerful explosives used by the railway in excavating the tunnel.

The wharf itself was one seldom used, and the building had been placed where it was so that in case of accident but little damage would be done to other structures.

The place had not been used for some time, and people generally supposed it to be empty.

This was not the case, although the small side door leading to the former office was unlocked.

There was still a considerable amount of explosive material stored in the cellar, the hatchway to which was left uncovered to admit the air.

Mason knew the place well, and was aware that in the cellar was a small door leading to the sewers.

The sewers in this part of the town were quite large, and had a raised ledge running along them upon which a person could easily walk.

Some caution was necessary, of course, to prevent one's falling into the water, but Mason's case was a desperate one, and he would be too cautious to fall over.

His intention was to reach the passage leading to the sewer, and by making his way along the raised ledge come to the water.

The boats were not far away, he knew, and once in one of them he would pull out into the harbor, stow away upon a sailing vessel, and so outwit his enemies.

He might do that, but he could not outwit the devil who had already laid his talons upon him, and was dragging him to perdition.

Had Mason not been discovered, he would have hidden in the warehouse until his pursuers, weary with hunting for him, had given up the chase, satisfied with having recovered the money.

Now, however, that plan was impracticable, and his escape must be immediate.

The only means directly at hand must be the sewer.

Grasping the revolver tightly in his hands, the scoundrel fired a couple of shots at his enemies, more for the sake of keeping them at a distance than of frightening them, for he knew he could not do that.

"Take him alive!" shouted Steve; "don't kill him if you can help it!"

"Thank you!" cried Mason, and then with a fierce bound he reached the door of the warehouse ahead of his enemies, and dashing through, closed and bolted it behind him.

"Surround the place," cried Bates, to a squad of policemen, who had just come upon the scene.

"Back, all of you, back for your lives!" shouted Steve.

"What for?" asked Bates.

"The villain will blow up the place, and thus cheat us."

The men retreated at once, though Bates found time to say:

"There is nothing to blow up."

"Yes, there is," said Mr. Locke. "The cellar is full of dynamite."

"Ah, I had forgotten," cried Mr. Franklyn, "the wretch can escape after all."

"How so?"

"The passage leading to the sewer. He knows of its existence."

"And I left my boat at the mouth of it," cried Steve.

"To the head of the pier with you," cried Bates. "Officers, guard the entrance to the wharf. My God! do you hear that? Run for your lives!"

The sound was the report of a pistol, but Bates knew what was coming, and it was well that most of the men were out of danger.

"The villain is blowing up the place!"

So cried Bates, taking to his heels, being the last man in the immediate vicinity of the warehouse.

Mason had, after closing the door, made for the cellar at once, but in his haste he forgot the open hatchway which lay directly in his path to the cellar steps.

He fell headlong, a distance of ten feet, but even that might not have killed him if that had been all which occurred.

His revolver flew from his grasp as he fell, and striking the floor below was discharged, two or three shots remaining in the chambers.

This was the noise heard by Bates, the detective.

The shots had a most terrible and unexpected effect.

They struck a five-gallon can of nitro-glycerine standing near, the bullets penetrating the wooden covering.

The shock was slight, but more than sufficient.

The can immediately exploded with a tremendous report.

The explosion was but the prelude to others more terrible.

Three or four heavy detonations followed, and the building was shaken to its very foundation.

Then came another, more terrible than all the rest, and a mass of flame, smoke, gas and flying timbers shot up through the center of the building, raising the roof completely off, and shattering the whole structure from top to bottom.

In the midst of the flying mass the body of Mason, blackened, horribly mangled and disfigured, every spark of life gone out of it was thrown aloft, while a cry of horror went up from all beholders.

He had met with a most awful fate, but who could say it was not a deserved one?

The hour of doom had arrived, hastened by his own act; outraged justice was avenged, and the crimes committed against those of his own blood most fearfully requited.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUR HERO'S TROUBLES END, AND THE TALE CONCLUDES.

THE shock was tremendous, and the flying particles did considerable damage to neighboring buildings, but fortunately neither our hero nor his friends were hurt, though Bates was thrown to the ground by the concussion.

The warehouse caught on fire and burned to the ground, the efforts of the firemen being unable to extinguish it.

The loss was considerable, of course, but nothing like what the railway company would have sustained had Mason succeeded in getting away with the money and stolen bonds.

The villain was dead, however, and could do our friends no more harm; and though they shuddered at his awful end, they drew a breath of relief when they knew he had given up the ghost.

By the time the fire was over it was daylight, though the sun would not rise until nearly an hour later.

A whole day had not been occupied in the wild chase after the villain, and yet more startling events had occurred in that brief space than happen in a lifetime to many people.

Of the plotters, all were dead except Jack Morton, the fireman, and he was carried back to Springdale, and sentenced to fifteen years in State Prison.

The bodies of Moses Harris, Frank Haydon's wicked father, Mason and the woman who had helped Steve, were never recovered, and, indeed, no one looked for them.

Tim Leonard remained in Rockwell's Bluffs for a month, being cared for by Mr. Franklyn, who often visited him, and by Steve, who brought him books to read and many delicacies.

When he was able to be moved he returned to Springdale, and after a while was able to resume his duties as fireman for Steve, who generally ran the lightning express, having no desire to give up his business, even if he was engaged to the daughter of a millionaire.

Frank Haydon was made conductor of Steve's train, as he had requested, and he often pointed out to passengers the place where our hero had jumped the gap at Pine Tree Run, the bridge having been speedily repaired and made stronger than ever.

Mr. Franklyn did not forget the plucky fellow who had been of such great service during that exciting chase, and placed a large sum to his credit in the bank, which Frank let accumulate, and when he married, at the age of twenty-five—still retaining his position of conductor on Steve's train, resisting all efforts to put him elsewhere, and appealing to Mr. Franklyn to keep his promise when any of the directors tried to interfere with him—bought a nice little house with the money, and settled down.

The work of repairing the damages done to the road was begun that very day, after the last of the villains had been disposed of, and trains were advertised to run through as soon as the Pine Tree Run bridge could be built.

Trains were run as usual over the rest of the road, and for a while through passengers were carried across the run by descending a winding path and traversing a foot bridge placed below.

There was one thing which had greatly puzzled Steve, and that was how the red lantern came to be placed upon the rock, which Mason and his pals had rolled upon the track at a point below Buller's Station.

It seemed to him very strange that the man who had put the lantern there should not have remained behind to signal the train, for it was only by the merest chance that Steve had seen it in season.

The explanation came the next day as Steve was sitting in the office talking with Mr. Franklyn and the secretary, the latter being about to start for Springdale with the recovered money.

Word was sent in that one of the switch-tenders down the road wanted to see Mr. Franklyn on important business.

He was admitted at once.

"My name is Graham," he said, without further introduction. "Steve knows me well; I am a switch-tender. I want to explain why I was not on hand last night to prevent an accident. I left my lantern on a rock, but did not hail your train."

"Fortunately for us, the messenger boy saw the lantern," said Mr. Franklyn, "and thus prevented an accident, although there was no time to lose."

"I was walking along the track," continued Graham, "when I

heard the voices of two men ahead of me, and saw them dislodge a huge boulder and roll it upon the track."

"Well?"

"Then they started off up the track and I ran after them, first stopping, unseen by them, to place my red light upon the rock, intending to return and signal the first train that approached."

"I shouted to the villains to stop and they did so; I then demanded to know who they were and why they had put an obstruction upon the rails. One of the men, whom I recognized as a fireman, a black-guard sort of fellow named Jack Morton, told me it was none of my business."

"Just like him," said Steve.

"I told him I would make it my business, and seized him by the throat. We struggled, and I was getting the best of him, when the other man struck me over the head and knocked me senseless."

"Mason seems to have taken pleasure in knocking people on the head," said Mr. Locke.

"When I recovered I found myself confined in a little tool-house about a mile away; I knew I could do nothing to prevent the first train's being wrecked, and when, soon afterwards, I heard the whistle of a locomotive, I trembled like a leaf."

"It was a down train that was coming, I knew by the sound, and they could not see the lantern from that side. Then I heard another one, and then the first one stopped, and pretty soon both of them rolled past, and I knew it was all right."

"How did you get out?" asked Steve.

"I was found this morning by the workmen, and I started at once to come here and tell you the true story of the affair, fearing you would blame me unjustly."

"No blame whatever attaches to you, Mr. Graham, nor would there even if there had been an accident; I would like to see all the employees of the Great Northwestern Railway as attentive to duty as you have shown yourself."

"Thank you, sir; good-morning," and the switch-tender, having vindicated himself, retired.

The poor bridge-keeper whom Mason had murdered was given a decent burial, and Mr. Franklyn settled a handsome sum upon his family, which kept them forever from want.

He had a son, a lad of about sixteen, and as he was a capable boy, Mr. Franklyn took him to supply the place made vacant by Frank Haydon's promotion.

Forbes, the engineer, was allowed to run his engine, as before, having proven by his acts that he was truly repentant for having so far forgotten himself as to join hands with the conspirators, and his subsequent conduct was such as entitled him to the highest esteem, and showed that the president's clemency had not been misplaced.

Bates was given a handsome present for his effective work during that eventful night, and the other detectives were not forgotten, by any means.

The poor lunatic, Mr. Stevenson, Steve's father, soon recovered under careful treatment, and ultimately regained his reason, which had been for a time unseated by the cruel conduct of his heartless son.

It was impossible to discover the villains who had carried out Robert Stevenson's instructions in regard to the treatment of the man, but the keepers of the State institution were reprimanded and removed for not having paid better attention to the case of the poor unfortunate.

His property was recovered and proved to be considerable, his railroad shares having largely increased in value, and when he died, a few years later, Steve was left quite a handsome inheritance.

Steve had borne the name of Price so long that he did not feel like changing it, particularly as he felt as much attached to his foster parents as if they had been related to him by all the ties of kinship.

Stephen Price, senior, lived many years after Steve's real father died, and felt as proud of the young man as if he had been his own son.

"I knew there was something good in him when I took him out of that villain Harrington's hands," he used to say, "and he has proved the truth of my words. He deserves every good that can come to him, and I say now, as I said years ago: 'God bless him!'"

When Steve arrived at the age of twenty-one he was married to Ida Franklyn, who had learned to love him more and more.

All of Steve's old friends were invited to the wedding, and Frank Haydon, faultlessly arrayed in a most becoming suit of black broad cloth, was Steve's best man.

Tim Leonard was present, of course, but so overcome was he by Steve's brilliant prospects that he was utterly confounded, and could only express his admiration by uttering the simple explosive and highly characteristic monosyllable:

"Gosh!"

This brought down the house, of course, and Tim retired, blushing like a garden of roses.

The bridal party took a trip over the entire length of the road, in a special train provided with every comfort and luxury imaginable, Forbes acting as engineer.

At every point on the road the young couple received an ovation, for Steve was well known, and there was not a single man, woman or child from Springdale to Rockwell's Bluffs who did not wish success and happiness to Engineer Steve and his young bride.

So, after seeing our hero out of all his troubles and crowned with happiness, I bid him farewell, and my readers, who I trust have been pleased with the recital of his trials and triumphs, not farewell, but *au revoir!*

[THE END.]

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